

REALITY OF GOD IN HISTORY
A Synoptic Study of Mark 10

A Professional Project
Presented to
the Faculty of the
School of Theology at Claremont

in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by Marvin L. Kennon
May 1981

© Copyright by Marvin L. Kennon 1981
All Rights Reserved

This professional project, completed by

Marvin L. Kennon,

*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty
of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Faculty Committee

Barton L. Mack.

Mary Elizabeth Moore

April 9, 1981
Date

Joseph C. Haug
Dean

To the Glory of God

Raymond Kenneth Kennon

Ethelyn Mae Peebles Kennon

A son honors his father, and a servant his master.
If then I am a father, where is my honor?
And if I am a master, where is my fear?
says the LORD of hosts
to you, O Priests, who despise my name?
Malachi 1:6a

But what is the use of learning,
if one does not attain thereby,
the very foot of God?
Ancient Tamil Couplet

"Mercy! Me!" cried out the blind one.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	x
Chapter	
I. BASIS FOR SYNOPTIC VISION IN MARK 10	1
A. The Problem of History	1
B. A Sketchy Objective Pattern Emerges in Mk. 10.	5
C. Human Need for a Subjective Transcending Pattern	8
D. Malachi: the Controlling Synoptic Vision.	14
E. The Key Conception: God's Honor	16
Exegesis: Section One: Defrauded of Honor as Father (vv. 1-31)	20
II. DEFRAUDED OF HONOR AS PROGENITOR (vv. 1-12).	21
A. Defrauded of Honor in Establishing Just Relationships (vv. 1-9).	21
B. Defrauded of Honor in Maintaining the Justice of His House (vv. 10-12)	34
III. DEFRAUDED OF HONOR IN GIVING LOVE (vv. 13-31).	37
A. Defrauded of Honor by Free Choice (Adoption and Blessing) (vv. 13-16).	39
B. Defrauded of Honor by Upholding (Inheritance) (vv. 17-31).	44
1. Defrauded of Honor as Provider (vv. 17-22)	47
2. Defrauded of Honor as Protector (vv. 23-31).	61
Exegesis: Section Two: Robbed of Fear as Master (vv. 32-52).	69
IV. ROBBED OF FEAR OF HIS OBEDIENT SERVANTS (SLAVES) (vv. 32-34).	72

	Page
V. ROBBED OF FEAR OF HIS OWN SOVEREIGNTY (vv. 35-52). . . .	79
A. Robbed of Fear in Establishing Justice (vv. 35-45) .	80
1. Robbed of Fear by His Power (vv. 35-40).	81
2. Robbed of Fear by His Authority (vv. 41-45). . .	92
B. Robbed of Awe in Granting Mercy (vv. 46-52).	101
VI. ILLUMINATING THE SIGHT OF GOD TODAY.	117
A. Lost in Delusion and Symbol.	117
B. Recovery in a Blinded World.	120
C. Some Possible Soul-Opening Steps	127
D. A Concluding Statement	148
BIBLIOGRAPHY	149

ABSTRACT

Mark uses the events in his chapter 10 to reveal the reality of God's activity in history and to give insight as to how that vision is obscured by the idols and inventions of the human mind. God's honor is the organizing principle Mark uses as a foil for connecting isolated events in the chapter and giving them transcendent meaning. Synoptic composition is the formal tool by which Mark creates his vision. After a discussion of the problem of meaning in history and how Mark might develop and use synoptic composition to reveal a transcendent solution, Mark 10 is exegeted in the form of a synoptic commentary. Finally, implications and proposals for awakening sight of divine activity in today's human events are explored.

In the exegesis sight of God's rule in history is obscured by the blindness of his progeny who refuse to see any reality in history other than their own imaginings. Mark, using synoptic literary devices, demonstrates how God is defrauded of his honor as progenitor and robbed of his fear as master of history. God creates the moral order with a pure motive of love and justice. Humanity is one, but at once begins dividing and divorcing itself from any sight of God. God's mediators graciously provide the law, but only because of now calloused insensitivity. But religious teachers wish to be the judges of a moral order which they themselves ordain. They depart from the way and their instruction causes others to stumble. The source of moral vision is abandoned. Their students who have never known the way hinder children from seeing the reality of God's moral activity and from receiving his gifts by the presumption of merit and achievement to now alien moral

ideals. Economic and religious leaders defraud the weak of God's upholding justice by self-righteous refusals to provide and protect. Worship, meeting place between heaven and earth where motives are purified, is profaned and becomes superficial and meaningless. God is cheated and left rejected in his own household. The order, now perverted begins to struggle and war with God's own messengers, seeking to plunder them of their redemptive messages of justice and mercy. Religious leaders rob powers not their own and seek to make a slave of God. Political despots, feeling immune from any justice higher than their own, steal authority and enslave whole populations. The corruption finally reaches many in the populace. They turn against the weakest among themselves, enslaving the helpless, deaf to their cries for mercy. Every step of the way God's messengers oppose this apostasy and declare God's nature and purpose in history cannot be finally divorced and ultimately thwarted. Tragic hope occurs when society's blindest of beggars begin to see the reality of what seemed irrevocably lost.

The implications of Mark 10 for human life may be profound in that Mark may be revealing in his work how the human may witness to divine activity in current events. The concluding chapter discusses the blindness of the contemporary situation and how the eye of the soul might be opened. Deification of symbols would be abandoned, false gods defrocked, and insight recovered in profound realities such as confession and repentance, sin, law working for justice and mercy, worship and responsibility, power and true authority. Possible specific steps are extensively outlined for religious publications, religious creative writers and artists, denominational mission, church-related liberal arts colleges, seminaries, and the local church.

INTRODUCTION

MY INTEREST IN MARK

One day four years ago while glancing over the Peter denial story in Mark I literally gasped as I began to see synoptic connections with the trial story that precedes it. I did a study of it and called it "see-together" composition. There was no doubt about it. The stories had contrasting and antithetical connections.

Two years later I tackled the Markan prologue, making a phrase by phrase, almost word for word, structural analysis of the literary structure, which was again clearly synoptic.

Later, going through Mark with an adult study group the synoptic structure was pervasive.

I never attempted to draw final conclusions. I simply recognized that Mark was a literary artist, and that it was clear that we could make no final historical or theological statements about Mark until we understood the literary genre.

The presumption behind synoptic composition is this. The structure of Mark appears based on synoptic pairs, including those that make direct comparisons, comparisons by juxtaposition and contrast, and antitheses. In structural analysis I have been unable to find a one, two, three outline form. It is always one-two. Where there seems to be a one, two, three, further analysis will discover the two-part division ("1a", "1b"; and "2" or the reverse). Every unit I have been able to discover thus far is built on the synoptic theme. In the text itself Mk. 10:1-31 and 32-52 are chapter halves that contrast and are meant to

be read against each other.

What is the value of this? Simple. If you understand one half of the pair operates it will clarify the baffling half. Or, if both parts are cloudy "see-them-together" until you see the analogy or principle that unites them. For example. In Mk. 10:34 the Son of Man is to be mocked, spit upon, scourged, and put to death. This looks like a simple narrative report, right? Wrong. Synoptically, there are two sets of pairs. Vertically, one set contrasts mental pain with the other's physical pain. Horizontally, each set contrast pain from the lesser to the greater degree. Greater clarity to the text is immediately apparent when the eye begins to be on the lookout for contrasts and antitheses. Mark means us to see these together. The composition is synoptic. The form itself becomes a vital interpretative aid to content.

When I began this project I didn't know where it would carry me. I had no presuppositions about what could be found. I simply wanted to take a large enough cross-section of Mark to demonstrate that synoptic composition did exist.

In studying the Greek text I tried to approach it as I would any document, disabusing myself of as many presuppositions as I could. I used commentaries mainly to help me get better handles on the Greek text and alert me to linguistic problems. Those problems generally explained away by exegetes ("Mark didn't know his geography", "Mark's Greek is poor", "This is a gloss", etc.), I would take as a flag for Markan literary balancing of some kind. Textual apparatus was also a source for occasional flags. Some manuscripts would "smooth out" what seemed an awkward or unreasonable word or thought in the text and in

doing so would wipe out Mark's synoptic contrast.

Fascinating has been the realization that Mark has synoptic contrasts not only within the text, but outside the text. Earlier studies of mine had indicated that Mk. 1:2-3 sets two Old Testament proclamations against one another. Both are eschatological and call for a preparing of the way. The first (LXX Mal. 3:1) heralds the coming of a terrible judgment and the second (LXX Isa. 40:3) proclaims the joy of coming grace. In its unusual setting I took this to be a structural flag to alert us that both Isaiah and Malachi had some overarching significance for Mark. Indeed, I profitably worked carefully through Isaiah and over the last few years whenever I studied an Old Testament text I was always alert to analogies to Mark and I would note them. Therefore when I got around to studying Mk. 10 the divorce section was an obvious flag for Malachi,¹ so I began at last to undertake a careful study of that prophet. In comparing Malachi and Mark so many more red flags popped up that I sought to go into Malachi in more depth. That is when I discovered Calvin. Unlike some contemporary commentaries that read like dictionaries, Calvin's exposition makes the text stand up and talk. His superb commentary was by far the best and this is where I began to experientially see the acrimonious debate in Malachi and feel the shock--and horror--of the implications of questioning God's justice and very existence. And when I turned back to Mark the parallels to the same sort of obstinate rebelliousness leaped out at me. The capper, of course, was Malachi 1:6 where I found the overarching

¹In Mal. 2:10 God hates divorce and demands faithfulness.

conception that Mark uses to organize his chapter 10. Things began to fall into place, puzzling gaps were filled and by closely following the lead of form alone, Mark 10 began to unify into a coherent whole. When I couldn't see the formal contrast or antithesis in the text itself I would check it against the Malachi key (or its context) and generally then I would see. I would cross-check the text horizontally and when finally the content fit the form the interpretation seemed synoptically checked and supported.

In writing this project I faced a critical question. Do I thoroughly detail synoptic composition in Mark 10 or do I explore what I found to be its far-reaching theological significance? I opted for the latter and have tried to make the exegesis basically a synoptic commentary. The reader will have to infer some of it and struggle with the text as I have.²

My hypothesis that synoptic composition is a device by which Mark can formally indicate God in history is where I am now on the question. There are still fifteen chapters to exegete. But it is certainly the vertical connections with the Malachi pattern and the horizontal formal textual linkage that takes the isolated events in Mark 10 and gives them coherent transcendental meaning. This may have profound implications for human life because Mark may be showing us how we may see the Living God in the events of our time! How the vertical breaks into the horizontal!

²My unpublished MS. "What Is the Literary Form of Mark 1:1-13?" has much more detailed exposition on the workings of synoptic composition.

I think the reader needs to understand that the struggle of synoptic composition aims at nothing less than reconstructing from the Greek text Mark's original working outline for the organization of his work. Form and meaning, say literary critics, are inextricably intertwined. I would hope that future work on Mark could eventually discover and validate the overarching conception for the entire work. I am guessing that insight gives joyous meaning to the whole of human life.

ORGANIZATION OF MY PROJECT

My project itself is organized in two parts. The exegesis is framed by an opening and a closing chapter. Chapter One backgrounds the problem of history and how it informs the theological understanding of Mark 10. The concept of "history" as it is used in religion is one of the most difficult to grasp that I know of. But the problem of "meaning in history" is perhaps the most fundamental problem of life which theology and philosophy must come to terms with. Are events in life isolated with no connections between them? Or is there some overarching meaning that helps us to understand the context of what happens? Mark 10 says there is a transcendent God working within events that gives meaning to them. If that activity is not recognized then we are blind to the meaning of life and the other patterns we superimpose upon events are false and will carry us to disaster. If Mark is wrong, there are profound implications. If God is not shaping history, then the Christian and Jewish religions are fiction, and the problem of meaning in history remains hopelessly unresolved.

The exegesis is divided into four thematic parts as I believe is

Mark's original outline. Chapters Two and Three of this project deal with the first two parts and turn on the theme of how God is defrauded of his honor as a father. Chapters Four and Five of the project deal with the last two parts and focus on the theme of how God is robbed of his fear as master. The key conception--God's honor--which is drawn from Mal. 1:6, is the foil for which Mark 10 explains the Reality of God in History.

To those standing in the ashes of Jerusalem in the late first century, Mark 10 explains why Jerusalem was destroyed and how God's justice controls history. Jerusalem's destruction wasn't an isolated, meaningless event--nor is any other similar national catastrophe. The activity of a Living God, wholly transcendent, yet living in history, is involved.

How can such a thing happen? By forgetting to honor that which brings order to reality and by honoring instead that which has no control whatever. It begins when religious teachers attempt to divorce God from history (Chapter One), and the economic and religious leaders refuse to uphold and extend God's justice and mercy (Chapter Two). As a result society's leadership attempts to silence the very voice of God by ignoring, then killing his messengers (Chapter Three). Finally the leaders steal power and authority devoted to God and in the final corruption "many" of the people twist good into evil and attempt to mislead even the weakest among them (Chapter Four). Every step of the way messengers of God contend with God's adversaries and uphold God's honor, explaining the source of the moral order, how it enters history, how God's sovereignty upholds itself against opposition, and how God's

purposes ultimately triumph. Tragic hope occurs when society's blindest of beggars begin to see the reality of what seemed irrevocably lost.

Chapter Six is the closing half of the frame that is meant to be read against the exegesis. It proposes the eye of the soul be opened to the illumination of God's reality in history. Deification of symbols would be abandoned, false gods defrocked, and insight recovered into some profound realities. Sight of God is obscured by our refusal to fully confess and repent. We have forgotten the nature of sin. We misunderstand how the law works and therefore refuse to give justice and mercy. Through devaluation of worship we have lost wonder, awe, and the sense of obligation and responsibility. Secular notions of power and authority have obscured sight and the following of false gods of faith completes the blindness.

In the closing half of the chapter I propose some steps that might help us open the eye of the soul to God's reality in the history of these times. Proposals include some for religious publications, creative writers and artists, denominational mission, church-related liberal arts colleges, seminaries, and the local church.

I have tried to be faithful to the text. The translations from the Greek are mine throughout. All of the failures, errors and misjudgments are my own. I have tried to use inclusive language wherever possible and regret those instances where I felt that I could not do so and remain faithful to what I understood to be Markan intentions.

I am deeply thankful for having had the opportunity to give glory to God at the School of Theology at Claremont. I am profoundly grateful to Dr. Burton Mack for his Socratic teaching methods and

determination to see the New Testament texts without blinders.

Dr. Rolf Knierim has also profoundly influenced me by the depth of his daily theological witness to God and his penetrating insights into the Old Testament texts.

Finally, I am grateful for the understanding and encouragement of Elaine George Kennon, my wife, whose insight into human life, including my own, I find absolutely astounding.

For all its blemishes this is the best offering I have.

Claremont

March, 1981

Chapter I

BASIS FOR SYNOPTIC VISION IN MARK 10

A. THE PROBLEM OF HISTORY

"What is the meaning of my life?" is almost the ultimate question. For one, "I'm a zero." For another, "I am God." We look to the events of our lives seeking some overall pattern. But woe to the pattern we superimpose upon events. We think we see a pattern--some standard to cling to--and poof! it vanishes someday in a disaster of life. If we give our fidelity to nation, war comes along. When it is our group, it breaks up. When it is husband or wife, death takes one away. Ideals give way to destruction. Life becomes sour because we see no pattern to events or the pattern we believe we distinguish disintegrates under the test of time.

We are living in an age of masked horror. Two world wars savaged many a hopeful pattern. The Jews struggle with the meaning of the holocaust and many see only despair. In Jamaica a voice sings " . . . a hon-gry man is a hon-gry man . . ." and on the walls of Kingston is the graffeti "The poor can't take no more." A news story projecting world unemployment and world starving in the year 2000, uses the word "billion" in connection to both. Practically every nation has its "ministry of justice", but where is justice to be found?

Contemporary history is witness to the failure to discern a pattern that can withstand the test. First one pattern and then another is lifted up. Then multiple patterns. Today's pluralism is witness to the fragmentation of contemporary life. With so many

patterns--all in one state of corrosion or another--life can only bring confusion, doubt, despair. The strength of the totalitarian cults is the appeal of some final unifying pattern to bring fragmentation under coherent control.

Events in themselves lack meaning except in the context of some larger whole. Our problem is that the human creature looks at the historical parade of kingdoms and empires--their rise and fall--the life and death of human beings and the institutional fabrications of their hands--and finds it difficult to construct a frame of reference to account for it all.

1. Historical Religion and Mark.

Against this is the revelation of historical biblical religion. The human does not and cannot find meaning in life and history by his own effort. The pattern breaks in upon him from beyond his own understandings. There is no natural law from which his reason may extrapolate guides for his conduct. It is "wholly other". It is this "wholly other" that the Hebrew prophets encounter as they apprehend events as part of a significant whole. Events are determined and fashioned by a God that fully transcends them while yet active within them. "Whatever happens, God causes to happen" is a reflexive "I am that I am".

Mark follows this understanding. Events in Mark "in themselves" lack meaning, just as do events in life. Every event in Mark--every pericope--appears complete. Each has a beginning and an end. But a

popular way of interpreting is to cut around¹ the event, cut it completely away, isolating it from other events. Then we study it and "see what it means". And so we come up with as many meanings as there are interpreters. The same thing happens when we take an event in our lives--say, death in the family--isolate it from the stream of events in our lives and pronounce woeful judgments. To do this is to treat life as all "hit or miss", chaotic meaninglessness, without rhyme or reason. When no pattern is perceived life is seen as unconnected, isolated, blown hither and yon by fate or chance.

Our failure in interpreting Mark could possibly be to the degree we fail to comprehend a pattern accurately. We try out our own pattern, impose it upon the text--as we often do in life events--and fail. Or we see patterns only dimly, partially, or not at all.

The exegesis of Mark 10 will show Mark sees events as having vertical and horizontal connections. And that they intersect at every point. This seems to mean that each event, while complete in itself, is related to a stream of events, historical and cosmic--that is, each event is a strand in an overall pattern. Seeing the whole becomes the important thing. It is not enough to say the "whole" is the historical pattern, or that the whole is the "cosmic" pattern. To look at the historical stream of one's life without perceiving divine purpose and action is life without meaning. To perceive what one believes to be the "cosmic" stream of events without relating it to the historical is more human fancy that ultimately dead ends again on the rocks with life without

¹From "pericope", lit. "cutting around".

meaning. The whole pattern, then, must be a merging. In every historical event, the divine is active.

To see the "whole" might also mean seeing beginning and end to the pattern. There would be "historical time" and "cosmic time". The beginning of both is "nature" and the end of both is "destiny". To understand life might be to perceive divine action in the events of our lives, framed by historical and cosmic nature and destiny, intermingled. Our life and death becomes intermingled with creation and the eschaton. In the pattern the beginning and the end converge to give each isolated event its meaning in the context of the total pattern.

How would Mark express such a complicated overlay? It would have to be inherent in the form of the story. Events would have to have logical connections. One pericope must have a historical relationship with another. Pericopes with pericopes, units with units. Further there must be logical vertical connections. Pericopes have vertical connections with pericopes. Units with units. And, if the cosmic were to intersect with the historical at every point, then it means the form would have to make apparent that connection. The exegesis will show that Mark 10 seems to do all these things.

2. At Stake: The Reality of God in History, Fact or Fiction?

Mark 10, however significant, is just a part of the total pattern he has created. Research, therefore, remains partial, yet much is at stake. There is no quest for a historical Jesus here. It is for what Will Herberg calls "in a sense, the ultimate problem of

life".² the search for meaning of history. Is there a God, wholly transcendent but alive and active in history, with history under divine purpose and control? More than that! Can the human creature today gaze within historical events about him and perceive divine action and purpose? In 1981 can we look at war in Afghanistan, or any political event, and yet discover a purpose and a meaning that is beyond us all? Can a pastor step into the pulpit as did the prophets and the sages of old, and see God in the reality of today's world? Or are we condemned to fantasies and imaginings of human minds, fabricating first this and that, limping into history with only a tattered fabric waiting for time to rip it all to shreds? Is there meaning to life or is it, after all, just a sham? Will there be a new dark age because the human creature has lost all connections with that which gave a nature and a destiny to the human race? Can holocausts, individual and global, be avoided or be understood in such a way as to survive with hope? Ultimately, at stake is the reality of God. Is God real or a symbol? As Heschel says, if God is just a symbol then God is just a fiction, a fabrication of human hands. But if God is real, then symbols are only makeshifts, and a living God expresses transcendent will and purpose unambiguously.³

B. A SKETCHY OBJECTIVE PATTERN EMERGES IN MK. 10

²Will Herberg, Judaism and Modern Man (New York: Atheneum, 1951), p. 197.

³Abraham Heschel, Man's Quest for God (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), p. 144.

Events in Mk. 10 do seem to have logical historical connections. It's not hit or miss. Historically the chapter seems to be a complete unit because it begins with Jesus' entry into Judea (v. 1) and ends with a final reference to travels "on the way" (v. 52). More formally, the chapter seems to be sub-divided into two parts.

Section I (vv. 1-31) does not deal with individuals but with two general categories: 1) An educational category of teachers and students--Pharisees (vv. 1-9) contrasting against Disciples (vv. 10-12). 2) A responsibility category of not-responsible and responsible economic and religious leaders--children (vv. 13-16) contrasting against a man (v. 17-22) and a chief disciple who speaks for others (vv. 23-31).

Jesus is the thread that ties all of the section together with two sets of pronouncements in the present tense: 1) "And he says to them", which introduces a conditional pair contrasting "leaving" (might divorce) with "receiving" (might marry) a wife (v. 11) or husband (v. 12). 2) "Truly I say to you" which introduces an unconditional pair which contrasts receiving a cosmic kingdom (v. 15) and leaving an earthly one (v. 29).

Section II (vv. 32-52) contrasts by dealing with particular "sons": 1) Jesus (v. 32) and the Son of Man (vv. 33-34). 2) James and John, sons of Zebedee (vv. 35-40) in contrast with the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus (vv. 46-52).

These sons make particular statements that contrast in several ways: 1) Jesus states what is ordained to happen to him (v. 32) and that the Son of Man will be handed over (v. 33-34). 2) James and John demand an honor (v. 37) and the son of Timaeus cries out for mercy

(vv. 47-48).

There are pairing links between stories, including two geographical locations, two rebukings, two instances of indignation. The copulas are unique. Many verses begin with the word "and". Many others with the postpositive $\delta\epsilon$ "but", often not reflected in RSV. These are just some of the more obvious formal relationships.

A sketchy pattern is beginning to emerge. There are two major sections, each sub-divided. There are contrasts and relationships within and between units. But where's any meaning? We see only hints, fragments. If that was all there was to be seen we would pass over quickly, if we stopped to look at all. And here is our historical problem in a nutshell. In the events in the lives of individuals and societies we perceive events mostly as only fragments. We see hints of connections, cause and effect, but no overall meaning that fills in the gaps and makes life intelligible. We are left to trying to analyze the fragments, and in cutting around (pericope) and isolating the events of individual or corporate life, we only deepen our ultimate estrangement.

In seeing events in their isolation Mark mirrors this estrangement. The history of exegesis is our witness. There is the cutting around of the divorce story and the most loathsome, unnatural, or unjust union between men and women can be cemented together by church or society upon pain of excommunication, hellfire or curse. The blessing of children story can justify a feigned meekness and humility that is powerless to deal with the reality of individual or corporate evil. The so-called rich man story can be the excuse for withdrawing from

the historical world and mortifying the body or piling guilt on anyone with possessions without looking to our own motives. The Son of Man pericope may be sentimentalized into soap opera by those who have never demonstrated obligation to God in their lives. The demands of the sons of Zebedee can be extracted from the context and reduced to an impotent moralism that wags a finger at "what happened way back there". The healing of the blind beggar story is ripe for unleashing a search for a magician in science, religion, or politics to save us from what ails us if we can just plead loudly enough.

C. HUMAN NEED FOR A SUBJECTIVE TRANSCENDING PATTERN

So we are lost. Objective events in themselves just do not make sense. And if God is in events we are blind to it. Yet we must impose some pattern on events, even if it is our own subjective fabrication. Life without meaning cannot be lived. And that pattern must be something that seems larger than ourselves, something that we can give our fidelity and loyalty to. Our ideals, our group. But that pattern--whatever it is and however it is constructed--becomes non-historical. It does not live in history, but is cosmic. This is an important concept to grasp. A cosmic pattern is not earth-bound. It is from beyond us. Nationalism as diety is a typical cosmic pattern for understanding. The concept is other-worldly. It does not live in this world of time and events. When we impose a nationalistic pattern of understanding upon the individual and societal events of our lives it is possible to create some meaning for what happens, that is, until reality breaks in and destroys what we have subjectively fabricated.

Anything to which we give final loyalty and fidelity to--or even partial-- is a created cosmic pattern. Socialism and capitalism are economic examples. Democracy, and the monarchy, are political examples. Custom, tradition, law are legal examples. Scientism, peace-of-mind therapies are technological examples. Diefying institutional religion, their theologies, and scriptures are religious examples. Ethical systems and ideals are philosophical examples. None are historical events, but when imposed from the outside, they can appear to be active within events-- even to some extent--pretend to impel them. When given fidelity-- partial to absolute--they become gods that rule our lives and pretend to explain our actions.

Those are the subjective patterns we impose.

1. Mark's Transcending Cosmic Pattern in Historical Narrative.

But suppose Mark has superimposed a transcendent cosmic pattern upon a historical framework? Suppose it was woven into the fabric of the text itself so that it would not have to be created by the invention of the exegete? Ahhh! Then, if Mark could provide a discernable cosmic pattern in a narrative text, then perhaps a transcendent God does so in our history, and by learning how Mark perceives it, we can perceive in some way God's activity in events of our time. At stake is revelation, not the wrong turnings that are the creation of our own creaturely minds.

What would be the literary form?

a. If a cosmic vertical pattern were to be superimposed on linear historical events, then the form of the text might have to be

basically "two-fold". There would be the historical and the cosmic. If they intersected at every point--and that is what has to happen if history has meaning--then the halves would have to be in close enough proximity to be "seen-together", perhaps at a glance. Almost like a parable or mashal with upper and lower halves. The form would be synoptic.

b. To superimpose such a structure on a linear text is a problem. How could the vertical appear on a one-dimensional, flat, horizontal text? The text basically is just words and word units. If a two-fold form were superimposed on words and word units then would it not mean that some words and word units would have to refer to the historical and some to the cosmic? Or to both? This could be done if we take into account the ambiguity of words. Some would have objective and subjective meanings. That would be two-fold. The objective half could mirror what we see with our eyes--the historical. The subjective half could mirror meanings perceived only by the mind--the cosmic. The words and word units would have to be clearly distinguished. Word and word units are after all, only symbols, meanings and ink scratchings "thrown together". So to express the vertical on a horizontal text, some symbol units would reflect clear objective historical meanings and some clear subjective meanings.

c. The arrangement would have to necessitate some regularity, else there would be confusion as well as contradiction of the "intersecting" purpose. A two-fold meaning is the simplest, most certain to handle, lending itself much more to a mathematical sort of regularity, than, say, a three, or a five. Working with two-fold meanings using

word and word unit building blocks, the form could even be geometric or architectonic. For instance, here would be one type of simple historical-cosmic patterning on a linear scale:

historic cosmic historic cosmic historic cosmic historic
The vertical thus joins the horizontal.

d. Where would an author get his formulas and symbols for his cosmic understandings? He would need to pull them from some generally accepted standard, such as literature, tradition, legend, myth or scripture.

Cosmic words and phrases are not hard to conceive. We use them every day. When the first American shook his fist and said, "Remember Pearl Harbor" he was calling on a cosmic symbol of the past ("Remember the Alamo") and superimposing it upon a historical event of his time, giving that event new meaning, enlarged by its cosmic connotations. Words like "freedom", "founding fathers" and others from cosmic American idealism form circles of meaning around interpretations of current events.

How could a larger unit be turned into cosmic significance? What is the clue? Perhaps the mathematical order could demand it, perhaps synoptically. Or perhaps a known buzz word or coded phrase. In modern politics just a dropping of one or two of these is enough to tell knowledgeable listeners what larger context of meaning you are speaking from. Identify someone as a "liberal", "conservative", "capitalist" or "socialist" and everything they say or do gets a special interpretation imposed upon it.

Most values, at bottom, are grounded in human self, but the

cosmic pattern the Hebrew prophets encountered transcended all other values, and was perceived by revelation.

e. What about style? A synoptic ordering would require a distinct terseness, clear beginnings and ends, two-fold figures such as comparisons, antitheses, contrasts, parallelism, and the like. Symmetry and balance to emphasize wholeness would be desired. Every word and phrase would have to be under rigid control else the balance, the intersections, the contrasts, and antitheses be destroyed. There could be no wasted words, digressions, or decorations. Every word, every unit, would serve the purpose of the whole.

2. Antecedents for Synoptic Form in Aristotle, Homer, Old Testament.

Where would Mark find a literary form that could be adapted to superimpose a cosmic pattern upon a historical framework? He might not look far.

a. In Aristotle's Rhetoric⁴ the language of prose must be either "free-running" or "compact and antithetical". "Free-running" style "has no natural stopping-places and comes to a stop only because there is no more to say on the subject." Its parts are united by nothing except the connecting words. The style is "unsatisfying" because it "goes on indefinitely". There's never a goal in sight (the stopping-places).

The "compact", according to Aristotle, is that which is in

⁴For my discussion following see Aristotle, Rhetoric, III, 9, 1-20.

"periods":

By a period I mean a portion of speech that has in itself a beginning and an end, being at the same time not too big to be taken in at a glance.

This kind of language, he says, is satisfying because goals are always in sight (the stopping-places) and "the hearer always feels that he is grasping something and has reached some definite conclusion." It is "easy to follow" because periodic form can be "numbered" (a countable number of parts or divisions) and number (such as in measured verse) is the easiest of all things to remember.

Aristotle goes on to describe the "period". It must not be completed until the sense is complete nor be capable of being broken off abruptly. It may be divided into either several "members" or "simple". "A member is one of the two parts of such a period." A "simple period" has only one member. The periodic style which is divided into members is either "simply divided" or "antithetical,"

where, in each of the two members, one of one pair of opposites is put along with one of another pair, or the same word is used to bracket two opposites, . . .

Aristotle finds this form of speech satisfying, because the significance of contrasted ideas is easily felt, especially when they are thus put side by side, and also because it has the effect of a logical argument; it is by putting two opposing conclusions side by side that you prove one of them false.

b. Harvard professor Cedric H. Whitman reaches further back in Greek history and finds geometric structure in Homer's Illiad. In his book Homer and the Heroic Tradition he writes,

. . . it is possible, for instance, to see that in Homer, the formulae, stock lines, repeated passages, and traditional motifs have surpassed their own functionalism in the service of a vast

controlling design; that repetitions are not mechanical, or even incantational, but architectonic; that imagery, action and character form one unified poetic substance, . . .⁵

His aesthetic analysis reveals in the Illiad ". . . not merely a unity of conception, but a unity everywhere articulated in the most minute details with perfected formal mastery. . . ."⁶

Homer's unifying conception, says Whitman, is a vision of heroism and in the appendix of his book there is an extraordinary four-page diagrammatic layout of the "Geometric Structure of Scenes in the Illiad". Here we see whole scene units set in contrast or symmetrical balance to one another, then larger units against larger units create a vast geometric design, and final whole.

Homer is perhaps a contemporary of eighth and seventh century prophets and Whitman finds the antecedents of this literary structure in geometric art of periods reaching much deeper in antiquity.

c. Hebrew parallelism is a well-known synoptic device. I have not seen any approach to Old Testament Hebrew texts similar to Whitman's treatment of Homer, but the Joseph and David stories look extremely interesting. (Joseph is called Zaph'enath-pane'ah "code-breaker" in Gen. 41:45).

D. MALACHI: THE CONTROLLING SYNOPTIC VISION

Is there a controlling vision to Mk. 10? If a single

⁵Cedric H. Whitman, Homer and the Heroic Tradition (New York: Norton, 1958), p. 14.

⁶Ibid., p. 15.

conception can be clearly and unmistakably identifiable, it would probably make sense of the historical fragments and fill in the gaps.

In examining the form and context of the text there is no escaping clear parallels with Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament. Here is where Mark got his controlling formulae and symbols.

1. The form itself. Mk. 10 is formally characterized by the most shocking and obstinate questions and dialogue, and fundamentally paralleled in Malachi. Instead of adopting the oracular style normally used by prophets, Malachi employs a blistering question-and-answer method of stating his arguments. The formal flag for this contention in Mark 10 is the extensive use of the adversative postpositive $\delta\epsilon$ "but".

2. The problem of history. In Malachi God is not seen in history, even when repeatedly pointed out. The meaning of historical events should lead God's children to gratefulness and obedience; instead they lead to base ingratitude, insult, and apostasy. God's chosen cannot be led by either kindness or scourging and it is the holy teachers who are the most prominent in their contempt for religion. Not only do they pollute God's honor by permitting superstitious and formal worship as if God were some trifling hireling, but what is offered in return for God's favor and love every mortal would reject.

The ingratitude is gasping. The Lord of History is absolutely abandoned. The teachers "despise" God and have led Judah, "the whole people", into apostasy. Stubbornly refusing to see and repent, God's justice and very existence is questioned and sniffed at. Despite the

threat of historical judgment and offer of forgiveness, the self-righteous ingrates not only insult God but continue to plunder and defraud him of his rightful sovereignty. The divorce of God from history is complete when his curse upon the whole nation is ignored and the sons of Jacob throw in their lot serving and following God's enemies--the arrogant and the evildoers. In the future lies a day of final reckoning when those who know their master will be spared and that which is arrogant and evil will be completely purged under a ban that smites the whole land. God's messenger will suddenly come into his temple and prepare the way.

3. Symbols and motifs. Many of the Mk. 10 symbols and motifs may be found in Malachi:

The teachers and instruction, the testing, the hardheartedness, the divorce, putting away and adultery, the indignation at injustice, the desire for Godly offspring, blessing and inheritance, the hypocrisy, insult and obstinate refusal to see, the mercy and gratuitous love of God, the desire for profit rather than gifts of gratitude and obedience, reliance on self and self-seeking, the seeking of self-glorification and honor without obedience, the preparation of the messenger, the eternal time, the road, the seeing, the sons, servants and slaves, the covenant and claims to have kept it, and running like a rushing river in both texts: stubborn, insolent self-righteousness, unfaithfulness and ingratitude.

E. THE KEY CONCEPTION: GOD'S HONOR

Within Malachi a single conception carries the cosmic burden of Mk. 10:

A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. . . . (Mal. 1:6)

In Malachi the Lord of History receives neither gratitude nor

obedience. He is the LORD of Hosts--the terrible leader and victor in battles who pronounces bans--yet his claim for honor does not issue from his ability to destroy but from his gratuitous love. "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? . . ." (Mal. 1:2b). Esau was first born, but Jacob who had no inheritance by natural right was chosen and adopted by God, as a gratuitous favor, and given the right of primogeniture.

There are two kinds of honor indicated. There is the honor of love and gratitude due a father who confers blessings upon his sons. A father guides a son by love and kindness. Even more love is demonstrated when a father adopts a son and gives him an inheritance that does not belong to him by natural right. A son knows his father and how much more love and gratitude is returned by a son who knows the father who, by favor, adopted him.

The second kind of honor is that accorded by a slave to his master. He knows who is the slave and who is the master. A slave dares not take liberties with his master nor be negligent of his wishes. He lives not by gratitude but by obedience and fear. He is led to a proper performance of his duties by his fear of chastisement, the scourge and his master's justice. The slave had no will of his own. His master's will is total and absolute. He cannot leave his master's house, like a son and then marry to pass on a grand inheritance. If he were to run away from the master's house, he would live in mortal dread of being found out, judged and put to death. Therefore, the slave, too, knows to whom he belongs. Knowing and fearing his master's power causes him to obey.

Malachi says it is because they forgot how God leads in history

by kindness and the scourage that his children doubly defrauded him of the honor of love or fear. God, therefore, in his LORD of Hosts battle dress, confronts his twice-chosen, twice-covenanted ones.⁷ They shook off his yoke and would not be ruled by his authority. Instead they "despised" it.

So here in one single cosmic noun--"honor"--is the unifying conception that links the cosmic and the historical in this one particular chapter of Mark.

The exegesis that follows translates Mal. 1:6 into a table of organization for Mark and uses it as a synoptic pattern for interpreting and understanding the text. Every verse in the chapter can be seen as making an assertion about God's honor, defrauded, robbed and despised, or honored, feared, and loved.

Every verse, every concept is viewed synoptically. It is the key to Mark 10.

⁷The sons of Jacob were covenanted out of love. The sons of Levi, who slew the apostates, received their covenant as a result of their obedience.

HONOR OF GOD (Mk. 10)

1. Defrauded of Honor as Father (vv. 1-31)
 - II. Defrauded of Honor as Progenitor (vv. 1-12)
 - A. Defrauded of Honor in Establishing Just Relationships (vv. 1-9)
 - B. Defrauded of Honor in Maintaining the Justice of His House (vv. 10-12)
 - III. Defrauded of Honor in Giving Love (vv. 13-31)
 - A. Defrauded of Honor by Free Choice (Adoption and Blessing) (vv. 13-16)
 - B. Defrauded of Honor by Upholding (Inheritance) (vv. 17-31)
 1. Defrauded of Honor as Provider (vv. 17-22)
 2. Defrauded of Honor as Protector (vv. 23-31)
2. Robbed of Fear as Master (vv. 32-52)
 - IV. Robbed of Fear of His Obedient Servants (Slaves) (vv. 32-34)
 - V. Robbed of Fear of His Own Sovereignty (vv. 35-52)
 - A. Robbed of Fear in Establishing Justice (vv. 35-45)
 1. Robbed of Fear by His Power (vv. 35-40)
 2. Robbed of Fear by His Authority (vv. 41-45)
 - B. Robbed of Awe in Granting Mercy (vv. 46-52)

SECTION ONE

DEFRAUDED OF HONOR AS FATHER (vv. 1-31)

Chapter II

DEFRAUDED OF HONOR AS PROGENITOR
(vv. 1-12)

The Lord of History is defrauded of his honor. The teachers have separated themselves from his living presence and no longer look for him in the events of time, but unite themselves instead to a legalistic framework of their own ideals. Encounter with reality becomes an opportunity for entrapment on behalf of their own ideals. Having divorced God from history, the Torah of Moses, which should guide them to a vision of reality is twisted into a book of rules, laws, and dreams, to be consulted for the proper interpretation of events. They themselves become blind guides causing their students to stumble. By obstinately refusing to see God's existence in the specific acts of justice and injustice in history, they utterly estrange themselves from what they profess to teach. God's existence is thereby denied and cut off from students. Transcendent justice is exchanged for partial judgment. Thus do the religious professors, sons of Moses, begin the cycle of unfaithfulness, divorcing history from the progenitor of the human family, who establishes and maintains all just relationships within the order of his creation.

A. DEFRAUDED OF HONOR IN ESTABLISHING JUST RELATIONSHIPS
(vv. 1-9)

¹And from there rising up he went into the borders of Judea beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered² to him again; and again, as was his custom, he was teaching them. ²But the Pharisees approached asking him "Is it lawful for a man to divorce a woman," testing him. ³But answering, he said to the, "What did Moses command you?" ⁴But they

said, "Moses allowed a roll of rebellion to be written, and to loose away." ⁵But Jesus said to them, "For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. ⁶But from the beginning of creation, 'male and female He made them.' ⁷'For this reason humankind shall leave its father and mother and ⁸the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. ⁹What therefore God has yoked together, let humankind not divide."

Apostasy is the cosmic setting for understanding from the beginning (v. 1). Moving in time Jesus comes into a space that has dishonored itself. Judea, the holy territory, is linked with the region "beyond the Jordan", Moab and its contextual echos of the apostasy at Ba'al Pe'or (Num. 24:1-12). There are no "holy people" (λαός) only the usual rabble (ὄχλου), which the messenger of the LORD continues teaching as did Moses, still in the wilderness, before entry into the Promised Land (Deut. 1:1). There are no grounds, therefore, for regarding the unfolding confrontation as part of a legal code on marriage and divorce. Nowhere else in Mark is there an ethical discourse. When Jesus "teaches" it is about God or the Son of Man.¹ Only the Pharisees "teach" doctrines of men (Mk. 7:7)! The habitual address here is the words of a sermon not a lawbook.² In the cosmic language of Mark, chapter 10 is an address to the reader in a teaching about God.³

¹Cf. Mk. 1:21, 22; 2:13; 4:1, 2; 6:2, 6, 30, 34; 8:31; 9:31; 11:18; 12:14, 35; 14:49.

²Cf. the four sermon addresses of Moses in Deut. which remove the contents from any hint of juristic casuistry.

³In Mark 10 the opening verse of each scene always superimposes a cosmic setting, and therefore pattern of meaning, on historical action. There are usually multiple symbols, distinguished by their subjective meanings linking them to OT symbols. If all the words Mark packs into his narrative were to have only objective meanings, then the events he describes would be like a thousand other events that no one can connect

The controversy begins with the clash of the teachers. The Pharisees (v.2) are not interested in learning about God. These professors think they already "know". They have no hesitation of drawing near and asking a question as if seeking enlightenment. But their interior motive⁴ is entrapment. The question is only a sham. God's very existence is to be put to the test.⁵ The problem of these teachers is that they no longer see the action of the living God in history. God is not seen in events, nor in any encounter as their question and motive demonstrates.

The two part question: 1) "Is it lawful" 2) "for a man to divorce (lit. "loose away") a woman?" presupposes a generalization from which a particular application may be extrapolated. Any encounter with living human beings in relationship with each other is frozen into bloodless, lifeless rule. Justice and mercy on the basis of historical encounter may thereby be avoided.

By asking "is it lawful?" the Pharisees ultimately pretend a question about justice but have narrowed it to a legalism, which is a structure of reality where the ordering of life has been ideally

with divine action, much less envision any larger pattern in the events of their own time. But Mark doesn't do that. The narrative is packed with words that have cosmic significance throughout, words or concepts that reflect a history of larger meaning in Jewish history. The ordering of the pattern comes from the Malachi framework.

⁴Note how the exterior action and interior motive formally frame the two-part question.

⁵Putting the LORD to the test is a contention that the God of history does not exist. Cf. Ex. 17:1-7; Deut. 6:16; Ps. 95:7b-11.

patterned by a broad system of laws. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn says that after a certain level of a problem is reached, this kind of thinking "induces paralysis and prevents one from seeing the scale and true meaning of events."⁶ This is what has happened to the West, he says. Western civilization, is structured with legalism, and that is why it cannot steer its way through contemporary events. Under paralysis meanings become predetermined, he says, and great skill is developed in using, interpreting and manipulating that meaning for one's own advantage and purpose. "Every conflict is solved according to the letter of law and this is considered the ultimate solution."⁷ Such as the phrase "no one is above the law", as if the law were so perfectly formulated it could not possibly be unjust, or that there might not be a sort of justice beyond the line of the law such as mercy. True justice perishes as "everybody strives toward further expansion of the extreme limit of the legal frame."⁸

Case law is partial human development. The law may be necessary to society, but it is the product of human hands, not the divine, subject to all the contingencies and sins of human nature. The appeal to human law is not, nor can it ever be, the demand of that which transcends all, yet causes all to be.

⁶Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, A World Split Apart (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 39.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid. He points to an oil company being legally blameless when it buys up an invention of a new type of energy in order to prevent its use.

"Is it lawful", by setting up a general ideal rule, God's existence, judgment, and participation in justice, is denied. It presupposes that there can be those who can capture the past, present and future and chain it to an isolated, perfect, unchanging pattern. Instead of witnessing divine activity within events and saying, "I see God's action, judgment and mercy", all of the divine will is squeezed out, frozen out, in exchange for a humanly conceived pattern that may be memorized and applied.

"Is it lawful?" makes the important thing the conformance to a rule, as if it were a static possession, bar or book that one must come to, rather than the giving away of justice and granting of mercy.

There is no "law" as we have come to understand it in the Old Testament, only Torah. The Old Testament (Mark's scripture) contains no legal regulation of life set out in juristic casuistry, such as the codes of Hammurabi, the Hittite, or Assyrian codes. The sermons in thin little Deuteronomy, for example, cannot be compared with the volume upon volume that makes the thousands of municipal codes, county and state statutes, or United States codes. Deuteronomy is couched in language "not of law, but of heart and conscience."⁹ It never flags in telling us that its guidance is for justice and mercy. The setting of Deuteronomy is not case law, but sermonic narrative. Even the Ten Commandments appear in a narrative setting. The repeated sin of the Pharisees in Mark is of extracting that which appears in the narrative

⁹Walther Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), I, 90.

context of a living historical situation, and concretizing and absolutizing it into another historical situation, for their own purposes. In exchange the encounter with the activity of the living God is subverted for the legalism of preserving their own ideals.

Ironically, then, as God is the one being divorced, the Pharisees ask, "Can a man put away (divorce) a woman?" The object is entrapment. They have no interest in justice or mercy in this historical encounter with Jesus--or any other servant of the LORD. They themselves have become the final judges of history and are ready to pounce with a "guilty" verdict no matter what the evidence. If Jesus answers, "yes, divorce is lawful", they may charge, "He's no prophet--just a pimp, out to indulge men's lusts."¹⁰ If he says, "No," they may shout, "Blasphemer, against the Law!"

In either case God is mocked. God's instruction--in the Torah of Moses--designed to insure justice and mercy, instead is perverted by the sons of Moses to test, entrap, destroy. All tests of messengers sent from God are, at bottom, tests of God and his authority. There is not the slightest hatred of injustice or wickedness on the part of the Pharisees. Instead there is only the lust to maintain their own position by destroying their enemy. Ironically, they seek to murder that which they pretend to serve. It is a sobering thought that when we take our own earth-bound patterns or ideals and deify them, to the degree we do, the vision of God in history perishes from sight.

As for the question about divorce itself--separation, rebellion

¹⁰Following Calvin.

and unfaithfulness is a primary theme in the biblical literature that Mark has before him. God unites himself to his people by covenant, he is faithful yet his people abandon him, reject him, and whore after other Gods. Israel yokes himself¹¹ to the Ba'al Pe'or. Jerusalem has been an unfaithful wife (Ez. 16) during her total history, bribing strangers to lie with her, scorning her husband. God hands her over to her lovers who will humiliate her, strip, stone her and cut her to pieces. In the allegory of the unfaithful sisters (Ez. 23) Obolibah (Jerusalem) dotes on paramours in Egypt "whose members were like those of asses, and whose issue was like those of horses." We avoid these chapters because our Victorian sense of politeness deceives us into seeing only illicit frivolity when the prophets are struggling to give us a sense of classic tragedy. Jeremiah fills two whole chapters with this tragic separation-divorce motif (Jer. 2-3). He proclaims to Jerusalem:

For long ago you broke your yoke
and burst your bonds;
and you said, 'I will not serve.'
Yea, upon every high hill
and under every green tree
you bowed down as a harlot.
Yet I planted you a choice vine,
wholly of pure seed.
How then have you turned degenerate
and become a wild vine?
Though you wash yourself with lye
and you use much soap,
the stain of your guilt is still before me.
Jeremiah 2:20-22.

¹¹Masculin pronoun as in Num. 25:3. In the relationship between parties in the Old Testament the sexual identities are used interchangeably. Sometimes God the bride and the wife and sometimes the bridegroom and husband. Sometimes Israel is female and sometimes, as here,

Jerusalem's children refuse correction; prophets are devoured by her own sword; her people have forgotten God "days without number"; she even teaches the wicked her ways and on her skirts is found the life-blood of the guiltless poor. The prophet, full of horror, asks

If a man divorces his wife
and she goes from him,
and becomes another man's wife,
will he return to her?
Jeremiah 3:1

Begging for repentance, return and acknowledgement of guilt, Jeremiah reminds Judah what happened to her faithless sister,

Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce; yet her false sister did not fear, but she too went and played the harlot. . . . Yet for all this her false sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but in pretense, says the LORD.
Jeremiah 3:8, 10

Israel is sent into exile but Judah refuses to learn,

Faithless Israel has shown herself less guilty than false Judah.
Jeremiah 3:11b

In Malachi the prophet asks,

Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?

Malachi 2:10

These and other such texts are clustered about supreme catastrophes. They are not isolated from events. They stand in shadow of the full horror of the rape of Samaria and the impending, or now completed, rending to pieces of Jerusalem. The prophets wail with the lessons of

male. The pronouns and images are only symbols and in nowise attempt to concretize sexual identity. In the text it is the masculine plural Pharisees that are unfaithful, lusting after other Gods.

history. The described consequences of abandoning the source of power and blessing are among the bitterest of literature.

They do not cry to me from their heart,
but they wail upon their beds;
Hosea 8:14a

They spurn the good and turn to Baal,

For they sow the wind,
and they shall reap the whirlwind.
Hosea 8:7a

Because of their wickedness--all of their princes are rebels--the LORD will drive them out of his house and love them no more.

You have plowed iniquity,
you have reaped injustice,
you have eaten the fruit of lies.
Because you have trusted in your chariots
and in the multitude of your warriors,
therefore the tumult of war shall arise among your people,
and all your fortresses shall be destroyed, . . .
Hosea 10:13, 14a

None of these Old Testament texts are ethical discourses on the human institution of marriage or divorce. Cosmic issues are at hand. And wherever they appear they are joined to announcements of doom. So pervasive is this issue in Old Testament texts that its reappearance in Mark 10 must have made Markan readers recoil in shock.

The Malachi-like contention of the text is underscored by the formal appearance of the postpositive (ὅτι) which appears at the beginning of vv. 2,¹² 3, 4, 5, and 6. Milder than (ἀλλά) "but", it remains adversative and conjunctive. Judging not a concrete complaint between a

¹²Against RSV and following W & Θ in the reading "But Pharisees having approached". This is the harder reading, and probably, therefore, the more correct, responsible for the variety of witnesses that smooth it out with an "and". The abrasive content strongly speaks against a καὶ connective.

husband and a wife before him, but their hearts, Jesus commands¹³ them to remember the commands of Moses to faithfulness to God and to justice and mercy. The professors reply (v. 4) lifting Deut. 24:1 out of its narrative context, such is their obstinacy in refusing to see. They would have Moses "allowing" a certificate of divorce as if it were an extra gift, a divine boon, bestowed upon those who would unjustly treat their wives and want some holy water sprinkled as they throw them away. Jesus says no, it was for your hardness of heart that it was written (v. 5).

A certificate of divorce (Gk. lit. "a roll of rebellion") is neither consent or license to injustice. It permits the innocent to separate themselves from injustice with honor. Divorce is granted only to permit justice to the abandoned party. There are two fundamental ways a husband can be unjust. The woman can continue living in the house rejected, forsaken, abandoned, while the husband satisfies his lusts by taking other wives (polygamy). Or she can be put out of the house, left with no provision or protection; and with no attestation to her faithfulness, she can even be charged with adultery and stoned. The decree of divorce is an instrument of mercy to see that justice is done. There is nothing here to suggest that divorce of any kind is forbidden or that any sort of hideous or unjust marriage must be upheld to the end. What is absolutely forbidden is injustice to God or mortals! The roll of apostasy is an official document that attests to the faithfulness

¹³The word is (εἶπεν) "said", not "asked", or "questioned". Mark is very particular about his language and he means what he says.

of the woman, and the failure of the man to give justice in his household. The woman's life, reputation and honor is protected. For the man separation from a source of love is a humiliation and a punishment. There would be no need for such a decree if injustice did not exist. There would be no need for it if God's children would obey his Torah and extend justice and mercy to all. It is only because there is apostasy, rebellion against God in the land, that God works justice out of injustice.

But the historical situation facing Jesus is not that of a husband or wife pleading for justice. The historical situation is the apostasy of the professors, those who pretend to know and understand the desire of God as spoken by Moses and all of God's messengers. Instead, the legal justification here is for the coming destruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem. God is the one that has been forgotten, forsaken, abandoned, rejected, spat upon while living in their house. God is defrauded of his honor by unfaithful apostates who have made his temple a hideout for robbers. God will be put out of the house and divorced only when there is a certificate issued that attests that God has not been the unfaithful one. God would not be humiliated, or scorned, or subject himself to those who would stone and try to kill him after charges of adultery. There must be proof to God's unwavering love, his faithful adherence to the covenant that would bring blessings of abundance to his children. The certificate attests that God has been faithful and just. And, it is Jerusalem, and the house of the LORD that is to be separated, under the decree of humiliation and punishment.

This sheds more light on the meaning of the destruction of Jerusalem. It is not an isolated, meaningless event, the result of fate, or the caprice of an unjust God. It is justice working out of injustice. It has connections that stretch back deep into the history of Israel. War, violence and destruction have their seeds in the injustice of the human creature who abandons the LORD of History and find security in blocks of wood--dust, like themselves. Mark says--as say the prophets before and Augustine after him--"Look to yourselves." The injustice is not God's, but your own. See how God, ever faithful to his promises, renews and extends justice no matter how evilly he is treated. There is an overarching moral order, a cosmic will, transcending human will, that throughout history can and will work good out of evil, as Mark will ultimately demonstrate.

But it was not God's intention that there be evil or injustice, says Jesus (vv. 6-8).¹⁴ As the prophet says, "I hate divorce" (Mal. 2:17). From the beginning of creation it was not so. Note, creation in the Markan context does not begin with loose elements, but with a transcendent progenitor creating human society. By the LORD of history's own act justice and mercy issues from gratuitous favor. Quoting also from the Books of Moses, Jesus makes a vital comparison using Gen. 1:27 from the first creation story and Gen. 2:24 of the second creation story. First, God is the father of male and female (v. 6). As progenitor there is an indissoluble bond of parents to children. The love

¹⁴ Again attention to the postpositive (δε) "but" that begins v. 6.

between the two are sealed by blood. On account of this "humankind" (ἄνθρωπος) shall leave its father and mother and the two shall be one flesh.¹⁵ It is God that creates the "ἄνθρωπος" with both male and female aspects. The two-fold design is for the purpose that they be united as one. God's purpose in history is not estrangement but harmony and unity. Humankind is not commanded to leave¹⁶ its parents¹⁷, as blood cannot be separated. It would be unnatural for father or mother to repudiate natural bonds of blood as broken. It would likewise be a perversion if children were to renounce the bond. But what the comparison does is demonstrate the bond that ties two parts of humanity together are holier than the bond of blood.¹⁸ The beginning and end of history are united in this simple comparison. The concept is foundational to the theology of whole chapter. "So they are no longer two but one flesh"--they are Mark's words, the closing half of the frame that encloses the comparison:

¹⁵RSV's insertion of "and shall be joined to his wife" is probably a gloss to clarify and give sexual identity to the harder and therefore more correct reading of its omission, following Codex Sinaiticus and others. It is a bracketed "D" reading in United Bible Society's Greek text. As it stands the genitive pronoun in v. 6 is neuter modifying the generic "humankind."

¹⁶καταλείψει is in the same word field as separation, divorce.

¹⁷It is clear here and elsewhere in Mark that God is one, that there be no sexual distinction to the progenitor who gives birth to humankind without a sexual consort, or union with another God. Cf. Mal. 2:10, 15. God therefore is both father and mother.

¹⁸Calvin says it is "marriage" that is holier.

But from the beginning of creation

(Gen. 1:27)

(Gen. 2:24)

So they are no longer two but (ἀλλὰ, emphatic) one flesh.

The purpose of God seen in the beginning is union--justice and right relationships.

There is nothing here finalizing, or absolutizing any concrete human institution. What does issue from the orders of creation is justice which humankind, in its individual and group relationships, must not ignore. Men and women do not literally become one flesh. God is the ground for all human relationships and justice is a bond that is as natural as blood.

The teaching concludes with the solemn warning: "Whatever God has yoked together let not humanity (ἄνθρωπος) divide." Division among the nations and the creatures--separation, pulling apart from one another, abandonment of one from the other, forsaking neighbors, rejecting nations, hating, killing--disturbs the moral order the LORD of history instituted from the beginning of creation.¹⁹

B. DEFRAUDED IN HONOR IN MAINTAINING THE
JUSTICE OF HIS HOUSE
(vv. 10-12)

¹⁰And in the house the disciples were asking him about this.

¹¹And he says to them, "Whoever might divorce his wife and might marry another commits adultery against her. ¹²And if she having divorced her husband, might marry another, she commits adultery."

¹⁹Not κόσμος ("world").

In the house again²⁰ his students question him about this. Jesus, still teaching, and not yet put out of the house, does not answer (ἀποκριθεὶς). He speaks in the historical present (λέγει) in a solemn teaching that no law humans can invent--no philosophy or system--can justify, cover up, or give final false pretense to what is in fact a violation of the moral order. There is no legalism here, no endless spinning out of concrete cases as appears in the casuistry of human volumes. God alone is the judge of history, and from acts issuing from human decision, causes to happen what happens, blessing or curse. He alone will maintain and uphold the justice of his house.

There is no penalty clause attached. This is not a two-part saying that may be captured by a law-book for usurping human judges, abandoning any sight of empirical events before them, to judge instead by force of rule, twisted by their own sense of security and advantage.

Blindness to God's reality in history, therefore, begins with the teaching that sees the self, not God, as the source of all justice. Ignoring God's activity in events, the human begins to interpret events, not on the basis of divine justice and mercy, but on the basis of tainted and partial human interests, which may be twisted hither and yon for one's own self-advantage. The judge, and therefore the God, of all the world, becomes the human self.

²⁰The scene is divided into its second half by change of location and the "again" which pair up with the two repetitions of "again" in v. 1. Jesus is still teaching.

But this is adultery. The divine is forsaken, rejected, and abandoned. A human created pattern of meaning is deified and lusted after. The law of a land, the tradition of a church, the writings and ideals of a person, are among the many idols the human creates. But the lusting after and adultery with false gods has catastrophic consequences, which readers of Mark, standing in the still smoldering ashes of Jerusalem, could not fail to perceive.²¹

²¹Cf. Moses' instruction in Deut. regarding adultery (Deut. 22:13-21, 22, 23-24, 28-29, 30) make clear that it is justice and mercy that is the foundational interest. The honor of the father is protected in Deut. 23:30. Adultery was not so much evidence of moral depravity as a violation of the husband's right to have sole sexual possession of his wife and to have the assurance that his children were his own. God desires "godly offspring" (Mal. 2:15).

Chapter III

DEFRAUDED OF HONOR IN GIVING LOVE
(vv. 13-31)

Now the Father is defrauded of his honor in giving love. The religious teachers, who themselves have departed from the way¹ cause their students to stumble. They in turn, totally blind to the way, defraud God's children from receiving blessings and rightful inheritance by hindering them from seeing God in the events of history. They neither know God, nor recognize those who are to receive his inheritance, nor the nature of it. They would deny God the right to choose whom he shall bless and actually interfere in the passing of the gift of God's love. Appropriating for themselves the right to choose, they see as evil those who cannot match their ideals. How terrible it is for the offspring of adulterous marriage to daughters of foreign gods!² Entry into the promise land seems blocked!

In the field of economics their idea of inheritance is "things", not the blessing that God passes down in his generous provision of sustenance of life and his willingness to be the protector

¹Cf. Mal. 2:1-8. The priests fail to give glory to the name of the LORD of hosts and he threatens to put them out of his presence. Their failure is linked with turning aside from the responsibilities of the way, causing others to stumble by their instruction, corrupting the covenant, and showing partiality in instruction.

²Cf. Mal. 2:11-12. The prophet calls upon Yahweh to cut them off from the tents of Jacob.

of the rights of the defenseless. The blessing has become perverted into something one merits by his own good efforts and is rewarded. Merit-seeking is a larger pattern of meaning, when superimposed on the events of history, paralyze and blind to any understanding of that history. It defrauds God of his honor in upholding his children. (How can God reach his children when the way is blocked?) Instead there is the posturing and imaginings that the gift of blessing, which rightfully belongs to God, can be appropriated as a right. They see an inheritance as a legal transaction that one is due, rather than a gift that one gives. Moreover, students of religion and leaders in the community, may pretend they are being led by God and are faithful, when in truth, they are led by their own injustice, couched in a puffed up pride and a superficial religion that pays no price, grabbing all but giving nothing. The chief apostates ultimately may claim to be the Rock himself. Meanwhile, God's kind acts as father of his house, in generously extending justice and mercy to all his children, is hindered and God is defrauded of gifts of love. And the children perish in moral estrangement.

In section one (vv. 1-31) God is defrauded of his honor as Father. In vv. 1-12 the progenitor brings justice into being by the creation of husband and wife. The two scenes that follow (vv. 13-31) contrast in the giving of love to offspring. The word field of these next two scenes is clearly "offspring" language, including love, endearment, inheritance, covenant, and that which a father gives:

Verses 12-16: "children" (παῖδες) not of the age of responsibility, "touch", "exorcised" (ἐπετέμνησαν) a contrasting evil gift, "Kingdom"

of God", "receives", "enter", "putting his arms around", "warmly blessing", "placing his hands".

Verses 17-31: 'falling on his knees', "inherit eternal life", "commandments", the covenant language: "do not murder", "do not commit adultery", "do not steal", "do not give false witness", the honor language: "do not defraud", "honor your father and mother", "guarded or kept for myself" (ἐφυλαξάμην), "youth", "loved", "grant" (ὀδός), "the poor", "treasure in heaven", "Kingdom of God", "enter", "children" (τέκνα) as an endearment address, "leaves house", "brothers", "sisters", "mother", "father", "fields", "receive one hundredfold", "in this season", houses, "brothers", "sisters", "mothers", "children" (τέκνα), "fields", "age to come", "life eternal", "first", "last", "last", "first".

These, in addition to the formal clues already mentioned³ unify the entire complex of vv. 1-31. These events of which Mark writes do not live in isolation from one another. They are clearly part of a distinguishable overall design. As the exegesis will clarify vv. 13-16 and vv. 17-31 contrast with one another and are the logical outgrowth of vv. 1-12, also in contrast.

A. DEFRAUDED OF HONOR BY FREE CHOICE
(ADOPTION AND BLESSING)
(vv. 13-16)

¹³And they were bringing the children to him, that he might touch them. ¹⁴But the disciples rebuked them. But seeing, Jesus was indignant and he said to them, "Allow the children to come to me do not hinder them; for to such is the kingdom of God. ¹⁵Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a child shall not enter into it. ¹⁶And having placed his arms about them he warmly blessed them, laying his hands upon them.

The pattern of meaning is established in the opening period (v. 13) contrasting children (παῖδες) below the age of responsibility

¹³See page 16.

who are to be offered for adoption and blessing⁴ with the would-be teachers of religion who exorcise⁵ the act⁶ as evil.

Those who are to be the future guardians of religious instruction, the disciples, asked to hear (v. 11) but didn't. Nor did they hear an earlier pronouncement (9:35-37). They, in fact despise (cf. Mal. 1:6) that which is granted by the free choice and gratuitous love of the father. God's right to choose to adopt and bless whoever he wishes is preempted by their own desires. That which Jesus would permit, the disciples rebuke, in fact, would exorcise as evil. The students, defrauding God, themselves and others, would, in fact, actively hinder the smallest, most defenseless creatures from receiving their Father's love. This is epic tragedy in its deepest proportions.

They do not understand that God, not they, is the sole source of blessing or curse. "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" Yahweh asks (Mal. 1:2). Jacob, the classic defrauder, who is the father of the tribes of Israel, does not receive his blessing because he cheated his brother Esau, but because when in the womb, as the two children struggled together, Yahweh said to Rebekah:

⁴See Mal. 1:2. Cf. how Jacob received adoption and blessing (Gen. 25:21-23; 27:1-45) and how he adopted and blessed Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 47:27-48:22).

⁵"rebuke" (ἐπετίμησαν) in RSV is in fact a technical Markan term for exorcism.

⁶The object of the disciples' exorcism is ambiguous, probably intentional.

Two nations are in your womb,
 and two peoples, born of you shall be divided;
 the one shall be stronger than the other,
 the elder shall serve the younger.

Genesis 25:23

All the laws of primogeniture are suspended as Yahweh himself performs the adoption and giving of blessing.

This is bad news for all closed societies, including religious and political groupings, that reserve for themselves the pretention that they are acting on behalf of the divine in giving or withholding blessings, or credentials for entry into favor.

It is God's gratuitous favor alone that decides. Children cannot decide what is to be given to them. Parents do that. Children do not give inheritances. Parents do.

In the text the first image, interestingly, is παῖδες, "children". There is no article attached in the Greek but throughout the remainder τὰ παῖδες is clearly neuter. These are not distinguished, therefore, as "male" children. Neuter implies small male and female children--not slaves--very young, perhaps infants.⁷ In Moses' sermon (LXX Deut. 2:39) every young child (παῖδόν) "who this day knows not good or evil" shall enter the Promised Land with Caleb and Joshua (LXX Ἰησοῦς). Again the choice for entry was made by God.

This is the choice that the students would hinder. The prophet of Isa. 59:2a says it is "gross injustice"⁸ that separate us from God.⁹

⁷Eight days old in Gen. 17:12.

⁸The dictionary definition of the RSV word "iniquities".

⁹The "b" half of the Isaiah citation and its context 59:1-2 will come into play in the blind beggar story, which has balancing connections with this children scene.

Seeing¹⁰ the action of his disciples¹¹ Jesus is "indignant"--a word that denotes the particular kind of anger aroused by injustice, unworthiness, or meanness. He tells his disciples to allow the children to approach him¹², and not hinder them, because of such category as these is the Kingdom of God. Despite the blocking of his disciples the free choice of Jesus to confer blessing is not ultimately thwarted. He warns the future teachers not to block what belongs to those who have no other protection aside from the promise of God.

The Amen logion (v. 15) is not case law but good news, emphatically denying¹³ that the Kingdom of God can be entered by any meritorious action but entirely by the gratuitous favor of God. It is cause for rejoicing! The sins of the ages are not forever on the backs of the sinful. "You don't have to forever keep pushing the stone up the hill!" And verse 16 establishes how such a joyous gift is given. It comes solely by the act of generosity and kindness, of a merciful and loving father, who adopts children, not his own¹⁴, warmly blessing them, and

¹⁰For ἰδὼν see discussion on 'seeing' words, pp. 61-62.

¹¹Note again the adversative postpositive δὲ.

¹²Note the contrasts in stories. The Pharisees freely approach with evil in their hearts and no one stops them. The rich man runs up and feigns worship but is not detained. Those who do not come by their own efforts, but brought by the love of others, are hindered, and cannot breach the separation until Jesus himself sees the injustice and so commands.

¹³οὐ μὴ.

¹⁴Adoption of offspring of other parents indicates gratuitous love and greater favor than the love for natural children. The problem of adultery with daughters of foreign gods is partially resolved by the possibility of adoption of offspring.

giving to them as gifts to continue into perpetuity all of the riches of his household.

And having placed his arms about them
he warmly blesses them,
laying his hands¹⁵ upon them.
Mark 10:16

There is nothing here of sentimental microscopic moralities. There is no requirement for one to smile passively and act meekly, to retire to the sidelines when there is heavy conflict or struggle. The powerlessness of children is not held up as that which may be mimicked by one who would rob and cheat in order to get what did not belong to him by force. God's choice while the twins Esau and Jacob were still in the womb makes clear that neither natural law¹⁶ nor sins of parentage can finally control or hinder God's gratuitous favor.

The conflict and contrast in this story is between those students who pretend to know final answers and those defenseless ones who do not and must rely on the mercy of another to provide and uphold. So, here is the next way God is defrauded and locked out of history. Good and evil become concrete tangible possessions, which may be appropriated, learned and handed down like property, from professor¹⁷ to student. Those who have received the property have the blessing, earned

¹⁵The laying on of hands is a ministration that calls on God's enabling power to be transfered. It is not presume power originating from the human.

¹⁶Such as rights of primogeniture "first born".

¹⁷In the Garden of Eden mortals are urged to eat from the tree of life provided by God, and forbidden to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. It is the crafty serpent that wins a disciple and

by obedient association. Those who do not have such property, do not have any blessing, and do not deserve it. Those who have good and evil locked into a system have no need to see God's action in events. They need not even look and do not, as they have a book of dreams of laws to consult or their own mental catalogue. The inevitable result is to despise the true judge of events and find ultimate evil in that which is ultimately innocent. When anyone is brought close to sight, their barking judgment and stinging rebuke paralyzes them.

There is no denying of good or evil here, or relativizing it, as is the curse of contemporary existence. Those who would be ardent for good are instead wicked. Their sin is blind iniquity--gross injustice--in their witness to human events. The faithful witness, always under the judgment of God, empties from self his preconceptions in abject repentance, in exchange for seismographical sensitivity that begs to distinguish God's movement in events. Those who already "know" good and evil have no need for God's active guidance by either kindness or chastisement, and may deaden their consciences and dull their senses so events no longer make any impression. All empirical events become relative waiting to be twisted by the moral desire of the beholder. As killers and murderers ignore the screams of their victims so do idealists infatuated with their own wisdom despise the Lord of History.

B. DEFRAUDED OF HONOR BY UPHOLDING (INHERITANCE)
(vv. 17-31)

initiates the estrangement. The two halves of self divide and no longer able to stand, falls.

The story of the infants, who have no power, or understanding, and who have not yet attained the age of moral responsibility, is now contrasted against those who should uphold them: a man of wealth who should provide, and the chief religious leader who should fight to protect.

Johannes Pedersen, in his chapter "Honor and Shame", describes honor in the early Old Testament as that which fills the soul and keeps it upright, rather than as what a man himself and others think of him.¹⁸ Job's honor consists in being able to give:

When the ear heard, it called me blessed,
 and when the eye saw, it approved;
 because I delivered the poor who cried,
 and the fatherless who had none to help him.
 The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me,
 and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.
 I put on righteousness, and it clothed me,
 my justice was like a robe and a turban.
 I was eyes to the blind,
 and feet to the lame.
 I was a father to the poor,
 and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know.
 I broke the fangs of the unrighteous,
 and made him drop his prey from his teeth.
 Job 29:11-17

Job provides for those who would perish without him and is willing to deliver and fight to uphold the life of those about expire in the fangs of the wicked. He is also a counselor. Says Pedersen,

The same honour which Job wins by giving counsel to the strong and strength of soul to the weak, he acquires through giving gifts to the poor. . . . To help the lesser is, in the eyes of Job, something far greater than a duty; it is a privilege.¹⁹

¹⁸Johannes Pedersen, Israel (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), I, 213.

¹⁹Ibid., I, 215.

He says in Job honor is based on a safely established harmony:

The community forms a closely connected circle, a society of friends where all belong. Each communicates to the other the blessing he possesses, but he whom communicates most has the authority and honor, because he upholds them all.²⁰

Harmony is maintained because it is determined by the relation between giving and taking." But it is not mechanically established, says Pedersen, "At the moment when the blessing departs from him, so that he can no longer give, he has also lost honor."²¹

"As Job says, the honour of the chief must be renewed. He must always be the one that gives all, otherwise he ceases to become chief."²² The great man in the early Old Testament "acquires wealth in order to give to others, and he is great because he upholds."²³

But this harmony is destroyed by the new city culture. Now honor becomes a demand for "possession", rather than giving or upholding:

The great profited by their strength to gather and collect, but they acquired wealth only in order to enjoy, not in order to give. They did not support the community, but impoverished it and calmly left the weaker to starve. They lived in luxury in houses of hewn stone, and trampled the poor under foot.²⁴

This new person, saturated with the desire to acquire, is a major problem Mark confronts, and the heart of the problem--and its solution--Mark finds lying deep within the Prophet Malachi's concept

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., I., 216. Pedersen gives no citation.

²³Ibid., I., 224.

²⁴Ibid., cf. Is. 1:23; 3:12-13; 5:8ff; Am. 5:11-12; 8:4-5; Mic. 2:1-5, and others. The new type of man is described in Section Two, pages 95-96.

of worship. God is defrauded of his honor in tithes and offerings (Mal. 3:6).

1. Defrauded of Honor as Provider (vv. 17-22).

¹⁷And as he was going forth on the way, a certain man ran up and fell to his knees before him, asking him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do in order that I might inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸But Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except one, God. ¹⁹You know the commandments: "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother." ²⁰But he affirmed to him, "Teacher, all these things I have guarded for myself from my youth." ²¹But having looked straight at him, Jesus loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack; go! whatsoever things you have, sell! and grant to the poor! and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come! follow me!" ²²But having looked darkly at the Word, he went away being grieved for he had many possessions.

Jeremiah, sorrowing over the stumbling of the poor and weak, turns to the rich men who used to know the way and judgment of the LORD (LXX Jer. 5:5), but they, too, have "broken the yoke" and "burst the bonds". Finding no one in Jerusalem who is faithful or repentant, all, therefore, innocent and guilty alike, must be rent to pieces by wild beasts, because of their apostasies (Jer. 5:6).

This is strong language, and the story of the unnamed man with possessions is a mournful, tragic echo. In confrontation with the man, Jesus, like Malachi, encounters hypocrisy, deceit, insult and apostasy.

Still beyond the Jordan on borders of cosmic apostasy, the man runs up and kneels in an eager show of sham obedience and reverence (v. 17). It is a profanation and the act of one who has no intention of giving willing obedience, as demonstrated a few verses later. He probably is in the front pew every Sunday. Moreover, Jesus, Lord and

son of the Father, is addressed as "teacher", as one might a seminary professor or foreigner who might be listened to but need not be obeyed. That the teacher is "good" in the man's sight indicates a pre-determined patterning for the meaning of his encountering of persons and events. He is therefore incapable of recognizing value of anything outside that patterning.

The two-fold question itself indicates that the man has received guidance before but refused to heed. "What shall I do" seeks what is expressly forbidden as the sole prerogative of God. And its contextual particular object to "inherit eternal life?" demands lasting possessions as if his by legal right. He is the "new town man" with nothing to give. There is no hatred of wickedness here, or repentance, only the seeking of one's own advantage as if God were hireling, who, when properly paid, would hand over the merchandise. Both the general and the particular halves of the question are those of salvation-seekers who delve into other-worldly mysteries, seeking private information, standing, or advantage denied to others. They are the brutes, dulled to the sense world about them, who seek glorification without justice, human rights without human obligations.

All this is crafted like a jewel, wrapped within the tightly designed structure of Mark's opening period. Not a word is lost. And beginning with v. 18, the adversative postpositive $\delta\epsilon$ ("but"), all but ignored by RSV, starts marching on a new series. We want Jesus to be the "nice fella" of the contemporary morality that pleasantly blesses both good and evil as if they were our brothers. But the form is of Malachi and the contention in Malachi is savage and deadly.

Grave issues are hanging in the balance. History can rise up and bless or it can incinerate to ashes and dung heaps. In Malachi truth and lie are in mortal combat. Mark, less stark perhaps, cloaked in suffering perhaps, but the combat remains there all the same.

Jesus' two-fold reply²⁵ "Why do you call me good?" illuminates the man's true motives, and chastizes him by the flat denial that goodness as a value may be found in any mortal or any partial fake divinity conjured up by the mind or desire of humankind. God's transcendent and absolute sovereignty ("No one is good except, one,"²⁶) is upheld as the sole sources of goodness. It flatly refutes classical Greek philosophies and roots goodness solely in encounters in history with God's revealed activity.

The second and final unit of contention²⁷ is initiated this time by Jesus, based on pure motive, antithetical to the man's motive in the preceding unit. Jesus, the true counselor, seeks to redeem that which is lost and bring selfish motive to sight. It demonstrates, however, the utter futility of any kindly teaching of those who are obstinate in their refusal to learn outside their own pre-conceptions.²⁸

Jesus' citation of commandments that "you know"²⁹ has puzzled

²⁵Always the synoptic pairs.

²⁶Cf. Mal. 2:10, 15.

²⁷Verse 19 to the concluding verse of the encounter, v. 22.

²⁸A harsh but fair judgment on us all.

²⁹Of course, οἶδας, a Gk. perfect, is used ironically. He has no insight at all. The man only has memorized a list and never penetrated beyond that depth.

exegetes and some scriptural witnesses³⁰ omit one of them--"do not defraud"--because it seems wrong and out of place. Yet here is where the seeking of pairs and contrasts of synoptic composition clarifies. It appears as if only ethical tables are commanded. But if Mark is synoptic there should be a cultic half. And so there is. The Malachi 1:6 pattern of honor is the missing link:

A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. . . .

"Defraud" denotes depriving one of his rights and usually connotes a deliberate perversion of the truth. Deceit or trickery is used to induce someone to part with something of value or surrender his legal rights. One who defrauds is a "cheat".³¹ God is the one who has been defrauded of his rights.³² It is his honor that is commanded in "honor your father and mother".³³ These words do not hold the sniffing connotations of contemporary society who return ingratitude and contempt for the enduring provision and protection of parental love. The ancients had a different idea. In Rome the pater familias had the power of imperium "life or death" over family members. He was not trifled with. In the covenant code whoever strikes or curses his father or

³⁰Including Mt. 19:18 and Lk. 18:20.

³¹Cf. Mal. 1:14 for the cheat who is cursed.

³²Cf. Mal. 3:8-9 for the robbing of God. Some LXX MSS. do use "defraud" as in Mk.

³³Again, God is one, and both parts "father" and "mother" refer to the progenitor who brings into existence offspring without co-habitation with other dieties.

mother shall be put to death (Ex. 21:15, 17). Honor your father and mother is one of the Ten Words that are chisled in stone and brought down to runaway slaves who will perish in the wilderness without the sustenance and protector of a heavenly progenitor. At the Shechem ceremony inaugurated to solemnly dramatize Israel's covenant responsibilities, there is a concluding charge of curses to protect the covenant from those who might otherwise escape the consequences of defilement. The second of twelve curses is the pronouncement by the presiding Levite: "Cursed be he who dishonors his father or his mother" (Deut. 28:16) to which the congregation responded "Amen". But that is not the half of it. Also lost to contemporary society is the implications and existential horror of the curse. One might secretly fool and hide his misdeeds from his neighbor, but not from God, who sees all, and executes final justice. A perusal of Deut. 28 will have a profound affect on the sheltered sentimentalist who has avoided the sights and sounds of historical horror worse than death. There is nothing new here in Mark. It is new only to a civilization who has largely lost sight of the LORD of History for the last three unenlightened centuries. The condition for life,³⁴ as it was at Shechem, as it was at Ba'al Pe'or beyond the Jordan, and at Hiroshima and Auschwitz today, is honor and obedience to God's instruction. History must exact a price when that which provides the sustenance of all life is hated, and that which protects justice

³⁴Deut. 30:19-20a: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him: . . ."

and mercy under its wing, is trifled with and found wearisome. We of the twentieth century generations who have trifled and hated our ways into two global wars, catastrophic famines and spreading slaveries of political tyranny, cannot afford to hoard our delusions of ethical and cultic purity much longer and sniff much more.

And this is precisely the world-destroying mythological deceit that the rich man cleaves to:

But³⁵ he affirmed³⁶
to him,
"Teacher",
all these things
I have guarded for myself³⁷
from my youth.³⁸
Mark 10:20

In debate--not a reply to what he "knows"--he affirms his own word as true.

a. He dishonors the source of upholding instruction by the obstinate repetition of the address "Teacher", proving he will refuse all true guidance.

b. He claims perfect obedience "in all these things"--as if

³⁵Adversative postpositive δὲ.

³⁶ἔφη, probably imperfect, implying durative action. The implication is an affirmation. The word also seems to act as a technical Markan device for division within a single unit.

³⁷ἐφύλαξα ἑαυτῶν the verb is reflexive here, an irony not reflected in RSV.

³⁸νεότητός implies from age thirteen, age of moral responsibility. Synoptic to παλῶσα.

they were material objects--ironically already contradicted by the first word to issue from his mouth.

c. He claims the inheritance as his alone ("I have kept for myself"),³⁹ defrauding all others, including God's right to give from his own free choice.

d. He gives false evidence ("from my youth") with the claim of obedience from the days of his assumption of legal responsibility.⁴⁰

These are the words of his lips, such as Mark notes earlier in 7:6-8:

'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,
'This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'

"You leave the commandment of God,
and hold fast to the tradition of men."

The commandment selected to show how tradition rejects the divine is,

'Honor your father and your mother'; and,
'He who speaks evil of father or mother let him surely die'.
Mark 7:10

This is the most fundamental opportunity to honor that which upholds. But when an upholding progenitor is neither loved nor respected the foundational motive of life is twisted. It is the motive of the rich man--guarding well for himself--that murders, and commits adultery, and steals, and bears false witness, and defrauds and dishonors father

³⁹In non-reflexive forms a technical term for of covenant-keeping cf. Mal. 2:7, Lev. 20:22, 26:3.

⁴⁰Cf. Mal. 3:7: "From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them."

and mother, and creates world havoc that slaughters massive populations, guilty and innocent alike.⁴¹ It is centered in his motive to serve self and not the transcendent, to take and not to give. When motive is impure, choice is corrupted. From within, out of the heart of man pours out every manner of evil.⁴²

Lovers of freedom without kinship or responsibility, take note: The planet groans on its axis gasping on ingratitude, dying from the asphyxiating pollution issuing from the hearts of humankind.

According to Malachi the foundation of God's right as a father, is the free gift of unmerited love (ἀγάπη) as expressed in the adoption of one that does not deserve to be a son (Mal. 1:2). The rejection of that love is the burden of Malachi's message (Mal. 1:1). This is one pattern of meaning from which the concluding verses of the encounter (vv. 21-22) are to be understood.

But⁴³ having looked straight at him, Jesus loved him,⁴⁴ . . .
Mark 10:21

No banal sentimentalities here. Here is the pure upholding

⁴¹Mark's prior cataloging in 7:21-22 compels the understanding that Mark wants us to see that the self-righteous heart harbors all that violates the commandments listed in 10:19 and elsewhere.

⁴²Cf. Mk. 7:21-22. Evil does not issue from ill disposition of elements or ignorance.

⁴³The postpositive again. Jesus' response contends against hatred and dishonor with love and upholding.

⁴⁴ἀγάπησεν Cf. LXX Mal. 1:2a "I have loved you says the LORD.

father motive, that sees without blinders the stark reality of scornful rejection, yet loves anyway. The response is in sharp contrast to a blind insolence that will not be yoked or tethered. Paraphrasing:

"Go!
 Whatever you possess
 sell and grant (ὁὐς)
 to those who have no provider (πτωχοῖς)
 Because that is where your heavenly storehouse really is.
 And come!
 follow me!

Mark 10:21

The man is invited to hear and to love, to repent and no longer defraud God. How is God defrauded? Malachi tells it in one succinct sentence: "In your tithes and heave offerings (LXX "first-fruits"). For Malachi this is clear evidence that the desires of God is little esteemed. By withholding the full tithe and presenting blemished offerings, the sons of Jacob, from the days of their fathers, have turned aside from God's statutes and not kept them (Mal 2:7). The defrauding of both of God's ethical and cultic rights, guaranteed under covenant, occurs in worship! Malachi wails the tragic truth: those who claim perfect worship are blind to their own vices. And, here, in the crowning concept of Malachi, Mark discovers a meeting point between heaven and earth, where sinful motive can be refined and purified. It is worship.

The Tithe. Israel is continually reminded that all things belong to God and they are but stewards (cf. Ex. 29:27-28, Deut. 14:22-29). Moses warns that success in Canaan will tempt the people to forget the wilderness lesson of complete dependence upon God's mercies (Deut. 8:1-20). "Beware," he says, "lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth'"

(Deut. 8:17), and the Divine Provider is ironically cut off from the earthly helpless. The flow of abundance is kept open by the tithe of the land. It is "holy to the LORD" (Lev. 27:31) not because God wants selfish possession of what is already his, but because through the free gift of the tithe holy purposes are fulfilled. The tithe goes into the storehouse. There, the town tithe (Deut. 15:29), for instance, is gathered and redistributed to provide sustenance of life to two significant groups who would expire without them: 1) the levitical priests, who bring true instruction to the people, and have no other source of support.⁴⁵ 2) the needy in the congregation: (a) the orphan and the widow who have no living protectors to secure for them provisions and rights, (b) and the sojourner, the one in an alien land, a foreigner whose upholder is absent. In worship, therefore, the tithe is the provision of the heavenly progenitor, mediated for earthly children. Its pure motive issues out of love. Refusal to bring the full tithe to the repository, the treasury, then, is the rebellious, ungrateful act of unfaithful stewards who will not extend the right of merciful life to the poor and the unprotected. The church doors are kept open but extension of justice and mercy, required God, and agreed to in covenant, is ignored. In Malachi, as in Mark's day, the whole nation is defrauding God:

You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me;
the whole nation of you.

Malachi 3:9

Mortals become the measure of all things. They have no regard for the

⁴⁵Their inheritance is God (Num. 18:21-24).

worship of God at all. It is as if they were not stewards at all, but owners, who by their own hand, effort and invention, created the riches they possessed, which belonged to them by right. Everyone becomes bent on their own profit, neglecting those without any other means of support. How utterly shameless is the demand for paradise (v. 17) when the road to it is blocked by a whole nation so openly sacriligious. Worship is conducted superstitiously or formally, without regard for obligation, as if they were dealing with a block of wood, like their other idols. Philosophy and other idealistic patterns do not require gratitude and obedience to justice and mercy. Their worshippers can laugh at them at will. Moses says flatly there will be no poor among us if we only obey the voice of the LORD (Deut. 15:4). But knowing our stubborn, recalcitrant hearts, he admits "the poor will never cease" (Deut. 15:11).

In Malachi--as here in the text (v. 21b)--God calls for the full tithes to be brought into the storehouse so that there might be food there and overflowing blessings (Mal. 3:10). The alternative is the terrible approach of the messenger who appears suddenly at his temple refining and purifying the sons of Levi till they present righteous offerings to the LORD.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Poignant with horror and grandeur intermingled is the tragic and ironical story of the widow at the end of chapter 12, who brings, not a tenth, but her whole living to the empty storehouse. The dropped mite must echo like a coin upon an empty cathedral's marble floor. When church pews are seen filling with widows and orphans, as the principal sustainers, the world apocalypse (Mk. 13) is about to begin.

The offering. The tithe was the merciful provision of the sustenance of life. The offering of first fruits was lifted up to God, by stewards, in an act of obedience, and consumed. It takes an act of faith to give complete allegiance without ever seeing the consequences or fruits of the heart's pledge. The first and the best, the unblemished, goes to God, not because God needs the offering, but he requires absolute obedience and the heart's acknowledgement of his absolute sovereignty. When one lifts up in worship a heave offering to be totally consumed, the heart is tested to its utmost. The best--the fruit of one's labor and loins--is separated from the possessive self and given to another. First fruits to partial causes is one thing, but it is doubtful that first fruits to the transcendent and for transcendent purposes can ever be accomplished except in worship. In Malachi, the LORD of hosts was offered what no one would dare give a mortal ruler: the lame, the sick, and that which was torn apart by wild beasts (1:8), while the best was profitably saved for one's own private gain and devouring. The LORD of History will not accept the weak and the mistreated and his children savaged by evil beasts in offerings of iniquities. Those are gifts to the devil. Final loyalty to the LORD--pure motive and purpose--is passionately demanded:

Justice and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and
and inherit the land which the LORD your God gives you.
Deuteronomy 16:20

This is the allegiance and pathway, Mark's Jesus commands the man with many possessions to follow.

Return to true worship can resolve the contradictions of the sinful heart. This is the implication. The return of bread and food to

the LORD's table ought to bring to mind, that it is as though God lived with us in the sanctuary. Refusal to bring justice and mercy, and our total allegiance, is an act of active insurrection and results in anarchy. That which God demands is instead despised. More than that! The neglect of that which brings order and sense to God's creation, means God's very right to rule--his existence as sovereign Lord and absolute master--is questioned and held to be of no account. All over-arching designs of history are perilously ignored, as if there were no reckoning, no final resolving of sin and injustice in human life.

The LORD's table, his altar, is consecrated with gifts, such as he requires, not as a penalty or harsh demand, but as a boon, a gratuitous favor, so that all people might have near access to the divine. But, as stewards forget to whom they and their fruits belong, and bring instead, what is expressly forbidden--poor victims torn apart by beasts, the lame and the sick--then God's merciful presence in history is obscured.

Mark 10:21 is no call for ascetism, to divest oneself of possessions and become a priest, friar or hermit. Mark never absolutizes. Nor is wealth despised, nor a pattern of guilt superimposed on the rich. Instead there is the language of abandonment to faith: to do justice--the perfect worship--and to follow obediently the source of that justice, who will ever explicate and re-explicate it in worship and in encounters in history. The language always in two parts: "Go!" "Come!" Mark tells us that while seeing him as the stubborn rebellious one he is, Jesus would adopt (ἡγάπησεν) him, as does God does Israel, and invite him to

keep the covenant and do justice so that he will have a storehouse⁴⁷ in heaven. This is not a personal repository, from which one may go to deposit accumulated wealth or merit and then draw upon as one would checks or savings at a bank. The storehouses in heaven are for a whole nation--the world of nations--when in the fullness of time, the full tithe of justice and mercy is given, and the windows of heaven fly open and pour down an overflowing blessing, as was promised from old.⁴⁸

It is the same invitation as Moses gave in that land beyond the Jordan to those who would cross over, enter and possess: ". . . I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life . . ." (Deut. 30:19).

At the choice point (v. 22), God's existence, his sovereign rule of justice, and his merciful invitation, is abandoned and rejected by a shocked, disbelieving one, whose dark and gloomy⁴⁹ actions prove that his heart belongs to another.

The depth of irony at this conclusion is saturated with tragedy and pathos. It is the human condition. The sinful self aspiring to rise from the depths, stumbles, unable to escape its own self-contradictions and falls back into the pit. The inheritance, never denied, always offered, is blocked by the obstinacy of the self, lost in allegiance to a self-deceit.⁵⁰ And the reality of God is obscured

⁴⁷Cf. ἡσαυρούς LXX Mal. 3:10. ⁴⁸Mal. 3:10, RSV.

⁴⁹στυγνιάσας heightened by ironical twist given by the post-positive δὲ. Cf. LXX Isa. 42:17, Dan. 2:12, also Ez. 27:35.

⁵⁰"With my own hands I have gained this."

and ignored.

2. Defrauded of Honor as Protector (vv. 23-31)

²³And having looked around, Jesus says to his disciples, "How hard it will be for the ones having things to enter the kingdom of God."
²⁴But the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus again answering, says to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to enter through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶But being exceedingly astonished, they were saying among themselves, "And who has power to be saved?" ²⁷Having looked straight at them, Jesus says, "For humankind impossible, but not for God; for all things are possible for God." ²⁸Peter began to say to him, "Lo, we have divorced everything and are following you." ²⁹Affirmed Jesus, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the glad tidings, ³⁰who might not receive one hundredfold now in this appointed time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come, life of the age. ³¹But many first shall be last, and the last first.

Having had one of the economic leaders walk away refusing to provide for the lesser, Jesus turns to his students and their chief leader, Peter, who labor under the delusion that "following" is hanging around a stronger protector and always agreeing with him.

We now leave the subjective of the commandments and enter a section organized around two objective word fields. First, the "seeing" words: "looked around", "looked at", "lo" ("look here!") and the world of objective vision: "riches", "camel", "richman". These seem to be linked with the Kingdom of God conception through a father-son "relationship" word field in which the subjective bond may also be "seen":

"children", "house", "brothers", "sisters", "mother", "father", "fields", "on account of me", "on account of the gospel", "one-hundredfold", "houses", "mothers", "persecutions", "age to come", "eternal life", "first", "last".

The opening verse of each scene--at least in Chapter 10-- continues to be the location for technical symbol words that trigger larger contexts of meaning. Verse 23 has the two-fold link of time and space:

And having looked around
Jesus says (λέγει) to his disciples . . .
Mark 10:23

Περιβλεψόμενος ("having looked around") is a very Markan word, appearing five times in Mark, and aside from its Lukan parallel,⁵¹ appears nowhere else in the New Testament. Its usage seems to link the cosmic with the historical. It is a link that recognizes those who obey (or do not obey) God with the parent-child relationship (or antithetical broken relationship):

In 3:5 Jesus looked around the synagogue with anger, grieved at the refusal of the Pharisees to judge historical acts that occur in holy time (healing on the sabbath).

In 3:35 looking around at those who sat about him he identifies them and "whoever does the will of God" as his brother, sister, and mother.

In 5:32-34 he looked around to see how his power had left him. Asking who touched his garment, a woman comes in fear and trembling, tells the truth and is told, "Daughter, your faith has made you well."

In 9:9 after a divine voice identifies a beloved son and commands he be listened to, the Three looked around and "no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only."

In 10:23 (the text) after one loved by Jesus departs without obeying, Jesus looked around and identifies for the disciples the difficulty of those who would enter the Kingdom of God.

In 11:11 Jesus enters Jerusalem's holy temple, looked around at all things, and left.⁵²

⁵¹Lk. 6:10.

⁵²Cf. LXX Mal. 3:1 where the messenger is said to "survey" (ἐπιβλέψεται) the way of the LORD, rather than "prepare".

The use of the aorist participle περιβλεψόμενος and the historical present λέγει ("he says") in this text seems to lift it from the world of pure history and event and center it in the Kingdom of God which is at once fully cosmic and fully historical.

Mark seems to say the rule of God is not a special place that may be entered with a ticket, purchased by either ease of right or difficulty of merit, a blessing as could be seen such as material wealth (v. 23). The stubborn rebels⁵³ are astounded at his words.⁵⁴ "But children,⁵⁵ Jesus says, if difficulty were the criteria, no one could enter by achievement, or by the practice of this or that virtue, or even, by making a "choice", as the Stoics claim (v. 24). All attempts to purchase or demand a ticket are doomed to result in such foolishness as ludicrous as trying to push the largest of God's unclean beasts⁵⁶ through the smallest, most narrow gate⁵⁷ created by mortals⁵⁸ (v. 25).

⁵³Sense again of the postpositive δε and context. Refusing to learn, they are astounded.

⁵⁴λόγους, plural, contrasts with the rich man's στυγνῶας ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ, singular.

⁵⁵Note the contrast of the postpositive adversative δε set against the warm endearing address used by a father "dear ones" or "children" (τέκνα).

⁵⁶Camel ritually unclean as food (Lev. 11:4).

⁵⁷τρομαλιᾶς, is a sound alike for πύλη "gate", "door" which is literally used for gates of cities, figuratively to the site of courts for justice or the gate that leads to life. Cf. Gen. 11:19a, 28:17b. Our English expression is "eye" of a needle, but the Greek seems to etymologically be closer to "small hole". Both gates and needles have objects that pass through. To the Greek-Jew this pun is tragically hilarious.

⁵⁸The "needle", crafted by human hands contrasted with the beast created by God.

The seeking of a holy space apart from historical time is a contradiction. The cosmic is inseparable with the historical. It is not like leaving one foul room, and passing through a narrow gateway, where beyond is the heavenly vista of purity and light. No, the historical is transfigured by the cosmic, and given its full valuation and meaning.⁵⁹

Amazed, as if they were young philosophers just informed Aristotle didn't attain the Good, the students debate⁶⁰ who else might attain it (v. 26). The underlying assumption to all this is "there's got to be a principle to follow to earn us a ticket!"

The question of God's favor is not a question for mortals at all, says Jesus, but for God⁶¹ (v. 21). The mortal has made a serious mistake in believing that he has the power to pile up achievements. The logical extension of such illusions is the ludicrous belief that he has the power to burst apart his historical chains and break into cosmic heavens, entering by demanded right or merit, which a divine gatekeeper must meekly accept and obey.⁶² The ultimate claim of power over the historical, that is, death, is a denial and divorce of one's need of God. It is a terrible blindness resulting in the dimming visibility of divine order and justice in history. The philosopher claims, therefore, to enter his inheritance by his ideals, the moralist his legalism, the

⁵⁹Bad news for Greek philosophers and holy rollers.

⁶⁰Again the postpositive δε.

⁶¹Cf. Gen. 18:14, LXX Job 10:13, LXX Zep. 7:6.

⁶²Maybe Saint Peter?

politician his legislation. But, as with all self-deceptions and illusions, those kingdoms never come. Justice--not to mention mercy--and righteousness remain elusive.

No wonder the disciples are thunderstruck and insistent that mortals may escape meaninglessness without God (v. 26). The apostasy is led by Peter (v. 28), whose very name must cause a curl to the Jewish tongues that pronounce it.⁶³ Using the formula for beginning his own word⁶⁴ and refusing to acknowledge his own helplessness, Peter offers superstition and superficial worship as keys to the kingdom. In contrast to the rich man, their poverty and professed allegiance to a leader for which they left their homes is held up as virtue such as the Marxists do. With supreme irony, Mark has Rock saying, "Look here,⁶⁵ at the way we⁶⁶ have divorced everything⁶⁷ to follow you,⁶⁸

⁶³Rock is an Old Testament name for God. Cf. especially, the Song of Moses (Deut. 32). "For their rock is not our Rock, . . ." (Deut. 32:31a).

⁶⁴"He began to say".

⁶⁵ὡς ὡς as if obedience could be "seen" like περιβλέψομαι.

⁶⁶The Greek uses the emphatic "we" form, contrasting with the emphatic form "you": "you lack" of the richman (v.21).

⁶⁷ἀφῆκαμεν . "left" "let go" in koine Greek but picking up the classical meaning of "divorce". In the Elephantine Papyri, 6th Century BCE, both χρῆζω and ἀφῆκαμεν are terms for divorce. Cf. I. Cor. 7:10-11. C. R. Taber, "Divorce", in Interpreter's Bible Dictionary (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), Supp. Vol. p. 244. Note the family of ἀφῆκαμεν words throughout Mark with their overtones of separation and divorce.

⁶⁸The irony is that it is "Justice and only justice you shall follow . . ." (Deut. 16:20) which would exact a painful price, but "you", a person, to whom the price of giving the assent to loyalty is trifling. The concluding Amen logion (vv.29-31) makes this interpretation compelling.

whom we are still following."⁶⁹

Not replying, but "affirming"⁷⁰ Jesus speaks of a much harsher price, antithetical to illusions of Peter. In the two-fold "amen I say (λέγω) to you" address formula, he locates the divine in the historical encounter, or event (vv. 29-30). The rule of God is found in an inseparable relationship that cannot be divorced or rent asunder by mortal effort. Can a reward be expected? One in this age, yes. One who walks away from the protection of his father's house,⁷¹ and kindred,⁷² and estates⁷³ on account of Christ and the Good News can expect to adopt the responsibilities and care for all the houses, all the kindred,⁷⁴ all the estates on the entire planet, and all the troubles and pangs that come with them.⁷⁵ And, in the time to come,⁷⁶ unchanging life of final justice,

⁶⁹ ἠκολουθήκαμεν, Gk. perfect indicating action in past time continuing to the present moment. Use of the verb implies total misunderstanding, total apostasy, from the moment of call to the present moment. It is a terrible verb with implications of judgment on the motivations of all the ordained who claim to be "called".

⁷⁰ ἔφη, imperfect, in contrast to the rich man's affirmation in v. 20.

⁷¹ Cf. Abraham's call, Gen. 12:1-3.

⁷² The exclusion of "wife" safeguards the interpretation of venturing out from underneath the protective umbrella of family power, while maintaining the blood bond of love and concern.

⁷³ All hope of earthly inheritance of material value.

⁷⁴ Exclusion of "father" from the list safeguards the indissoluble blood bond with the divine progenitor, while avoiding the suggestion that the LORD of History needs any protection whatsoever from mortals from chaotic cosmic evil.

⁷⁵ The price for Levi becoming God's mediators was to slay apostate brothers, companions and neighbors who had broken the covenant (Ex. 32:25-29).

⁷⁶ αἰῶν τῷ ἐρχομένῳ not ὁ αἰῶν μέλλων "the age to come that brings the reign of God". The μέλλων would imply destined, inevitable coming.

qualified by God's own unhindered act, which none can predict, control, or lay claim to contribute to. In this cosmic paradise approached only by faith, no one can be sure whether they shall be first or last (v. 31).

The relinquishment of all moral pretense to earning final vindication, to renounce the right to create larger patterns of meaning from the invention of one's own mind, to give up all hope of earning one's own reward outside of transcendent demands for the painful price to be paid for the extension of justice and mercy to the whole of humanity, is the terrible, majestic, pride-crushing word here.

The child of God who would wish to follow is utterly defenseless--vulnerable always within and without to the savagery of wolves with ripping fangs. He battles to uphold because it is the parent's wish. The child obeys his kindly parent out of gratitude only, reverence, love and respect. There is no choice point, such as by "merit", whereby one can "choose" God. The child is the one "chosen". There is only returning, where one--not by conscious act or will--sees his own sin and helplessness illuminated in the catastrophes of history before and behind him, and begs for the mercy of God the father, God the mother, holy progenitor.

There is no final inheritance for one, only for all. As for Levi, God is the inheritance. Beyond human justice--proclaims this

The only event in Mark "destined", "ordained" to happen in history is the death of the son (10:32, the next verse!) In 13:4 the disciples ask when are these things "destined" (μέλλη ταῦτα) to be accomplished, and Jesus begins to tell of terrible apocalyptic death, ending in a cosmic coming of the son of man.

Good News--lies mercy. But this is bittersweetness.

As Section I (vv. 1-31) concludes, see here the human predicament: The administration of justice has been usurped by human judges. The moral vision of good and evil is in the hands of counterfeiters who have never seen the original. In the field of economics the leading stewards have not had their motives purified by worship and the plenty in the land's storehouses⁷⁷ dwindles to empty. Religious leaders permit superficial worship and refuse to protect rights guaranteed by holy covenant. With no one upholding the nation can only descend into sensuality and glory-seeking. Provision and protection is twisted into an entirely humanistic legalism by which the Roman world gave bread and circuses as we give handouts and TV football. The only blood that leaders are willing to spill are in payment for the murders and wars that maintain their own security and possessions. The poor and the defenseless are without providers. They pay the leader's blood prices but no protectors pay for them. And in each city's most wretched quarters, then, as now, those who live on the borders of existence, abandoned and perishing say, "Where is the God of Justice?" "The LORD of hosts does not exist."

So it is that God is defrauded of his love by self-deceived teachers, students and leaders. Moral vision in history appears murdered and the love and kindness of the most generous progenitor lies hidden in the gloom.

⁷⁷Cf. Gen. 41 where Joseph institutes a tithe of a fifth for Pharaoh's storehouses.

SECTION TWO

ROBBED OF FEAR AS MASTER (vv. 32-52)

As the curtain lifts on Act II, the scene has abruptly changed.

There are the formal signals:

1. The opening ὅτι and δὲ.¹

2. The abrupt change in language. Now the word field is "slave-master", "fear-obedience":

"amazed", "afraid", "must"², "happen", "lo", "handed over", "condemn", "death", "ridicule", "spit", "whip", "kill". (Remaining scenes:) "we wish", "do", "grant", "right", "left", "glory", "cup", "baptism language"³, "rulers", "lord it over", "great ones", "wield authority", "great", "servant", "first", "slave", "to be served", "to give his life", "ransom", "beggar", "cried out", "Son! David!", "mercy", "call", "casting away his mantle", "sprang up", "Rabbouni", "straight-away".

3. The formal contrasts from the earlier "father-son" motif.

The questions become requests: decrees, demands, great outcries. The general identities become specific: there are no longer the general terms "Pharisees", "disciples", "children", "a certain man", but now it's "the twelve", "the son of Man", "James and John, the sons of Zebedee",⁴ "the ten", "the son of Timaeus Bartimaeus", "the many".

¹The opening two words signal change and contrast. "They were" (ὅτι) is the only non-"and" introductory word in any of the scenes of the chapter. The second word the postpositive adversitive δὲ throws the remainder of the chapter in sharp relief against the opening section. This whole section "contends" with the preceding.

²τὰ μέλλοντα, "ordained", "destined".

³See commentary on v. 38.

⁴Peter earlier is the exception in v. 28. Interestingly, even this is not an exception if the name "Rock" is taken generically.

4. The word "son" no longer is used in the natural blood sense⁵, but is linked to a master.

5. The overarching Malachi table of organization shifts in nuance. God is no longer "defrauded" but "robbed", no longer of his "honor"⁶ but of any "fear".⁷ The text verifies it:

"To defraud" denotes a deceitful hidden motive to cheat, usually privately, accomplished by stealth. The Pharisees have a hidden motive and appear eager to learn. The disciples' rebuke appears from honorable intentions. The rich man would deceive Jesus and self that he has kept the commandments. Rock, is a pretender and usurper as the student leader who would deceive Jesus and self that he has followed.

But "to rob" is open, blatant, flagrant, arrogant public plunder. Its motive is in the open. It grabs away suddenly by force and, if opposed, can cause bodily harm. The Son of Man is to be humiliated, beaten and killed. James and John openly demand possessions of sovereign powers that do not belong to them. The rulers of the nations do not hesitate to tyrannize and bind their populations into slavery. The "many" would muzzle the blind beggar to deny him mercy, and when caught would mislead him.

6. Finally the content, beginning with the opening scene: If ever there was a picture of mortal dread of a master who punishes terribly, behold! But who is the slave and who is the master?⁸

⁵See commentary below.

⁶Love.

⁷The synoptic contrast.

⁸"Free!" shouts Hecuba, "No man in the whole world is free. Not one. Slaves all to what they own or want or fear." Euripides, Hecuba, 870.

Chapter IV

ROBBED OF FEAR OF HIS OBEDIENT SERVANTS
(vv. 32-34)

³²But they were on the way, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was proceeding ahead of them; and they were amazed, but the ones following were afraid. And having taken alongside the twelve again, he began to tell them what was ordained to happen to him, ³³saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man shall be handed over to the chief priests and the scholars of the law, and they shall condemn him to death, and hand him over to the Gentiles; ³⁴and they shall mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days, he shall rise."

The opening period (v. 32)--always where the symbols are--begins with contention on the road to Justice,⁹ coming up to Jerusalem.¹⁰ But now it is covered with a thick cloud of portent-packed words indicating the terror of a divine procession,¹¹ with some oblivious,¹² and others yet¹³ following justice were struck with shuddering awe.¹⁴ Mortals

⁹The "road", always an ancient symbol for "justice". Even the word δίκη "justice", originally may have meant a "way" or "a path". W.K.C. Guthrie, The Greek Philosophers from Thales to Aristotle (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 6.

¹⁰First geographical name since "Judea beyond the Jordan". Must be on the far side of Jericho in uncertain territory.

¹¹The ἄγγελος of the LORD leads. Cf. Mal. 3:1!

¹²"Amazed", as in "How novel!", certainly innocent of pending events, synoptically contrasting with the "fear" of the others.

¹³Gk. postpositive δὲ, synoptically putting the ones "full of fear" in opposition to the ones merely "amazed". Again, it is the form that clarifies.

¹⁴"The ones following were filled with fear". The sense here is "shuddering awe of divine events". (Cf. 16:8.) Synoptically contrasting with the ones just "amazed". Tragic irony here. Justice has

hear of mysteries¹⁵ about to unfold in events¹⁶ which are divinely ordained.¹⁷

In the first word of v. 33, the identification begins:

Behold! ('Ιδοὺ), we are going up to Jerusalem
and the Son of Man shall be handed over.

In contrast to Rock (v. 28) "lo" or "see here", the formula indicates obedience. God is the master of the Son of Man. But the one that punishes terribly is not God, but humanity, whose kingdoms and pretenses to sovereignty are rejected by the Son of Man.

And behold, the price of accepting the rule of God and rejecting the rule of humanity: the Son of Man is to be completely dishonored. No one will see value in him. He is to be "handed over"¹⁸ to institutional religious leaders and scholars of the law, who will see him as cursed and profane, not worthy of life, a contamination and evil to be

vanished. Upholders are now the possessors. Looming ahead the city which the holy messenger will come suddenly into, refining, purifying. The ones who are still following justice are filled with this terrible Greek imperfect ἐφοβοῦντο. Durative, for innocent and guilty alike face the wrath.

¹⁵"Having taken along side" followed by a "he began to say" formula. The "along side" could be a flag for "parable".

¹⁶"to happen" (συμβαίνειν) Gk. word, only here in Mark, seems connected with tragedy. Cf. Aristotle's Last Will and Testament begins with, "All is well, but in case anything should happen, Aristotle has made these dispositions and twice he calls on heaven to forbid "if anything should happen" to ones he makes provisions for. Diogenes Laertius, "Aristotle", Lives of Eminent Philosophers, V. 11, 12.

¹⁷RSV "must" (τὰ μέλλοντα), but sense is "divinely destined."

¹⁸παράδοθῃσεται not "betrayed" which is another Greek word entirely.

exorcised and purged from the community. And their action is to take all that valuated by God--his love and kindness in history--and condemning, as if it had no value whatsoever, its visibility is to be expunged¹⁹ from the very memory of the holy people and handed over to those who openly organize life completely around themselves,²⁰ completing the attempted divorce of God from history.

Now the final indignity:

And they shall mock him (dat.)
and they shall spit upon him (dat.)

and they shall scourge him
and put him to death

and after three days he shall rise.
Mark 10:34

When God is seen as completely absent, when the overweening pride of the human mind is in complete triumph, blind to all but the impressions its rationalism permits to be imprinted, then life shall be nothing but humiliation and degradation and there is no way out for humanity other than torture and murder.

The synoptic formulation is clear. Those who see events as unconnected, chaotic or irrational; or, those who impose their own pattern upon events:

a. Shall inflict mental punishment. First, the humiliation of all that is just and merciful in history--ridiculed as a fool, imbecile, moron. Secondly, spat upon with blobs of hate as one

¹⁹From "condemn him to death".

²⁰The "nations" ("gentiles").

indescribably loathsome and despised.²¹ Imagine the ideas of "mercy", "kindness" and "love" being seen as weak, contemptuous things. Imagine "fairness" as becoming commercially impossible, being held up as "un-profitable". Imagine "justice" as the means ones in power keep control. One has only to read the Gulag Archipelago to see the vengeance of Man the Master, who will divorce from history any other meaning but his own.

b. Shall inflict physical punishment. First, the scourge.

"We shall make an example of this fool for the sight of all." Those who see no meaning in life, beyond the measure of their own minds, seek to give moral instruction using prisons, secret police, gestapos, inquisitions, witch burnings, holy armies, swords raw with blood. All the horror of absence of justice will descend to plague humanity and tear its flesh. But, secondly, there shall always be prophets and seers who will persist in their vision of transcendent meanings and obligations seen within the events of their time. Therefore, their lives must be extinguished! All who beg to see, all who dare to serve the sort of justice and mercy that can never be vindicated in history, who know the penalty of persecution beforehand--murder them! "Extinguish the very light itself and let darkness rule over all!" The demons are let out inflicting wars, holocausts, and mass exterminations.

²¹In a famous chapter Thucydides describes a time in Athens when greed for power created excesses of savagery in which every man feared and hated his neighbor and the very meaning of words changed. Deceit was praised as shrewdness, recklessness held to be courage, loyalty, moderation, generosity, scorned as proofs of weakness. Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, III, 82, 3.

When blind humanity's cursed worst has been accomplished, Mark has Jesus say, simply, "and after three days he shall rise." It is cosmic language, full of mystery, removed and set apart from the prying looks of those who would go beyond the world of witness and see behind that which only the divine may see. But there is a thrilling poignancy to it that sends ripples up the spine. We can see one thing, however dimly. Even with justice and mercy globally twisted and murdered into apparent extinction, it is not the last word. The brute is not the victor. In the end, Mark's Jesus hints, justice and righteousness may triumph after all. Not by mortal act, but by God alone.

If these three verses be parable "taken along side" then we have a vision of the historical actions of mortals demanding slavery to the desires of self-created patterns, and the cosmic mirror of how God is robbed of his fear.²² "Man cannot serve two masters" and the conflict for loyalty is total. To be faithful to one is to be unfaithful to the other. To serve the inventions of mortal minds--their larger patterns of meanings--divorces the transcendent. And the consequences and reward of both is death. Yet with eyes open, the price of obeying self as true master is to humiliate and degrade, plague and murder, all humanity. The alternative is death with a vindication obscured by history, approachable only by faith in the Cosmic Master.

These are hard words. The claim of absolute sovereignty of God in human life is an awesome demand. To suffer indignity for a glory that can never be one's own--or to become a brute.

²²Cf. Job 28:28, Prov. 1:7ff.

Clearly illuminated, too, is a different sort of obedience from that which humanity exacts from its slaves. Mortals use force to compel obedience to rule, or law, or sovereign nation. They command through legislatures laws that protect the security of the few masters, and compel courts to instruct and punish, if need be, the many. In societies of nations the threat, the ultimatum, and bombs are used, not in the service of liberating weak captives, but to preserve the economic and political security of the strong masters. But the obedience of the Son of Man seems to be a willing one. What it hears and translates into action is that which no force on heaven or earth can compel: justice, mercy, righteousness, steadfast love, compassion, kindness. All these are "beyond the line" of law, cannot be compelled, are not written, cannot be enforced by threat or action of a court. And instead of protecting just a few, it upholds all. If engraved at all, it is upon the human heart, as wounds of one who has put away the pride of illusion and joined oneself to the reality of history.

The overwhelming mood of this scene is of terror mingled with unmerited suffering. The Lord of History is robbed when he is shown no fear, as if his wishes were unimportant, that to deal with him is as with a child who can be instantly ignored. He is robbed of his fear when he sends obedient servants, and they are humiliated and killed.

In Greek literature there are terrible portents when the mortal invades spheres that do not belong to him. The gods are jealous and strike. When the administration of justice is entirely in human hands, when values become relative to be twisted to suit whims of the partial,

when economic leaders do not uphold by providing, when religious leaders do not fight to protect, when motive remains perverted and true worship ignored, the human is trifling with forces cosmic and angry. The covenant between heaven and earth that keeps the chaos from spilling out of the windows of heaven has been broken. Is there no fear of reckoning? Is it with impunity that we can mock, then despise, then attempt humiliating correction and at last murder the obedient servants of the divine?

When God's reality is completely unseen and unloved, the consequences for human society are catastrophic indeed.

Chapter V

ROBBED OF FEAR OF HIS OWN SOVEREIGNTY
(vv. 35-52)

God's sovereignty is now ignored as if the LORD of Hosts did not exist at all. Secular faiths take over arguing there is no power or authority for establishing justice but their own. No mercy except by human whim. The final scenes--with the sons of Zebedee, the ten, and the blind beggar--document the tragic corruption of religion, politics and morality as it spreads from religious leaders to tyrants, to the people themselves. Mortals demand divine approval to their self-coronation as masters. They would issue divine decrees and become divine counselors while enslaving the weak and muzzling petitions to any higher authority. But the weakness, the true lack of power and authority of the human master's justice is also exposed, and the awesome price of plundering God of his sovereignty is revealed.

Here are some examples of the formal antithetical links between the justice and mercy halves (sons of Zebedee, son of Timaeus) of the final unit:

Contrasts

Near Jericho, Moab side	Near Jericho, Jerusalem side
James and John (pl., Heb. names)	Son of Timaeus (sing., Gk. name)
Sons of Zebedee (sonship Gk. form)	Bartimaeus (sonship Heb. form)
Two student leaders	One blind beggar
Approaching (uninvited)	Sitting (invited to approach)
Two demands:	Two outcries:
General: Do anything we ask.	General: "Mercy."
Particular: counselors in glory	Particular: "Recover sight."
Having heard, the ten indignant	(Having heard) "many" exorcise
"Teacher"	"Rabbouni" ("My Master")
Wants royal mantle for nothing	Self-exorcism, casts away
	mantle, leaps up, follows.
Jesus cannot grant	Faith grants

A. ROBBED OF FEAR IN ESTABLISHING JUSTICE
(vv. 35-45)

The LORD of Hosts has dominion over all of life and establishes justice by virtue of his power and his wielding of authority. He has absolute sovereignty. There is no other source of power and authority. Those mortals who would fearlessly oppose the master's power and authority, who would plunder his kingdom for their own enrichment and advantage, cannot by their delusions escape his justice. Their greed for dominion will blind them to the reality of their utter weakness and vulnerability. No slave can usurp a master's power and authority with impunity, as if the master will not suddenly return to his house. In blind confusion--be they nations or individuals--they will go forth, staggering under the grand intoxication of their delusion. Yet their consumptions of ever greater draughts of feigned power and authority will cause violent internal struggle and wretching. Refusing to see their utter powerlessness and shattered authority, raising denials of guilt to the end, they lie exhausted and expire. It was their own illusions in collision with reality, prompted by the motive of greed and overweening pride, that killed them. Thus is divine justice upheld.

The scene with James and John and the "ten" is formally divided into two units (vv. 35-40, 41-45) through the six repetitions of the copulative and adversative postpositive $\delta\epsilon$ ("but") in vv. 35-40 and $\kappa\alpha\iota$ ("and") in the remaining ones.¹ RSV repeatedly ignores the

¹Except for the negatively introduced v. 43 which in the Greek contains two other strong negatives $\text{o}\acute{\upsilon}\chi$, $\alpha\lambda\lambda'$, in addition to the $\delta\epsilon$.

postpositives, rendering them "and", avoiding the acrimony that is clearly indicated.² As in Malachi, the contention is violent, obstinate and grave. Apostates³ are Jesus' adversaries. The violence of this scene has been lost through a text-ignoring tradition that insists on retaining the honor of those closest to Jesus. Mark's harsh textual realities are not faced, and the sight of God is obscured for a preferred Matthew. Thus, the politics of governing is handed over to the whim of mere mortals and the glory of God suffers.

1. Robbed of Fear by his Power (vv. 35-40).

³⁵And approaching him, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were saying to him, "Teacher, we wish that whatever we might ask, you might do for us." ³⁶But he said to them, "What do you wish I should prepare for you?" ³⁷But they said to him, "Grant us that we might sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." ³⁸But Jesus said to them, "You know not what you have asked for yourselves. Have you power to drink the cup which I shall drink, or to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized?" ³⁹But they said to him, "We are powerful." But Jesus said to them, "The cup which I am drinking you shall drink; and the baptism which I am baptized you will be baptized; ⁴⁰but to sit at my right hand or my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

The scene opens with the gloom unrelieved. The aura of fear,

²Another example of clarity that arises from knowledge of the larger Malachi patterning.

³So shocking are the demands that Matthew (Mt. 20:20-24) deletes one entirely, puts the other in a form of a supplicant request of a kneeling mother, eliminating entirely the contention of the postpositive structure. Jesus remains entirely the master, saying "What do you want?" instead of "What do you wish I shall do for you." The mother asks Jesus to "command", not "grant". Luke eliminates the story entirely.

of impending catastrophe and doom is even heightened. The horror of mortal threats to the ordering of God's creation brings no repentance or obedience. It makes no impression at all! Just the opposite. The reaction of James and John, would-be religious leaders, is now to rob God of his right to govern. No longer are they satisfied with instructing, mediating and protecting. Having lost all fear, they pervert creation by a ghastly demand that would make a slave of God, to forever do their bidding. And if that were not enough, to steal for themselves that which has been devoted to God alone.

As Cratylus in Plato's dialogue says, "The man who knows the names knows the things."⁴ And so it is that this story is pulled out of history and given its cosmic meanings by the identification of James (OT, "Jacob") and John as "sons of Zebedee" (υἱοὶ Ζεβεδαίου) in the opening period (v. 35). For Markan readers who have made the Torah "as frontlets between your eyes", the name and context instantly recalls the sin of Achan, son of זבדי,⁵ (Josephus: Ζεβεδαίου "Zebedee"⁶ in Joshua 7. Joshua 7 tells how despite the LORD's victory upon entry into the promised land at Jericho, the people of Israel rejected his governance in regard to devoted things. Achar, son of Zebedee, of the tribe of Judah, finds a royal mantle and a mass of gold, and instead of offering it to God, thinking he has no need of it, in violation of the

⁴Also true of Old Testament literature where etymologies are important.

⁵Aramaic. Heb. זבדיה.

⁶The consonantals are the same as the Aramaic. Josephus, Jewish Antiquities, 5, 33, (10).

oath of destruction, he digs a hole in his tent, burying the treasure, hoping to elude alike his comrades in arms and the eye of God. But the LORD was witness and for the breaking of faith he causes Israel to lose a surprising battle at Ai ("ruin"). Achan is confronted by Joshua (LXX 'Ἰησοῦς), asking him to "give glory to the LORD"⁷ and "render praise to him (Jos. 7:19). Achan does so by confessing, and he and all of his possessions, including cattle and sons and daughters, are stoned and burned in the Valley of Achor ("Trouble").

That which Achan had stolen had been among that which had been declared "sacred" and was to "go into the treasury of the LORD" (Jos. 6:19). Having no fear of God or his ability to insure justice, Achan's act was one of political insurrection. First, violation of the ban was a violation of the just means by which God effectively forbids the waging of war from a motive of lust, conquest or booty, "seeing that even the victor might be visited with the ban, if guilty of transgressing it".⁸ Not only did Achan rob God of what was due because of his faithfulness, but he also robbed the poor. To grab a royal mantle of an alien king,⁹ and make it one's own, is a ghastly denial of sustenance of life--justice and mercy--to all those who live on the

⁷Cf. Mal. 1:6.

⁸Eichrodt. He says modifications of strict forms of the ban were further acts of mercy, for which Israelite kings were noted. Slaughter out of sheer lust is unknown in the OT. There is no mention of raping women by Israelite warriors, and even fruit trees (Deut. 20:19f.) are protected by the laws of war. Walther Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), I, 139-140.

⁹Babylonian.

borderline of existence, who, were it not for God and his covenant, might expire at any moment. The entry in the land, and God's victory over the unholy at Jericho is predicated on presuppositions of absolute sovereignty of God, and the upholding of justice and mercy in the land, through the dedication of pure offerings to the LORD.

The designation "sons of Zebedee"¹⁰ and the remainder of v. 35 should alert us to judgment in history and how disobedience to the extension of cosmic justice and mercy in history is most tragically resolved. James and John, who will commit their apostasy on the far side of Jericho, do so not under the cover of stealth or deceit, as did Achan who hid the booty, but openly, by drawing near the presence of Ἰησοῦς the messenger leader of the band,¹¹ with no sense of shuddering awe,¹² and demanding:

We wish that whatever¹³ we might ask,¹⁴ you¹⁵ might do¹⁶ for us.
Mark 10:35

¹⁰This interpretation, as we shall see, is cross checked synoptically with son of Timaeus Bartimaeus and further validated.

¹¹Cf. v. 32, also Mal. 3:1.

¹²Addressing Jesus as "Teacher" rather than "Lord".

¹³Unconditional demand.

¹⁴Conditional aorist subjunctive ἀτρήσωμέν indicating continuing unconditional demands.

¹⁵The emphatic enclitic σε as in "You-you do this!" Not the genitive σου "of you", as RSV has it.

¹⁶Aorist subj.

This is the first of two outrageous demands. First, generally, that the messenger of the LORD become their slave. So it is that God's activity in history is obscured and perverted. The LORD of History and his messengers become the scapegoats for mortals to curse or plead crocodile tears to. They want a diety who will rectify the mistakes they are responsible for and to clean up their messes. They want a LORD of illusion, not of reality--a symbol, not a living Lord. Jesus' words in v. 36 clearly contends:

But (δὲ) he said¹⁷ to them
What do you wish I should prepare¹⁸ for you?

Argumentatively, and obstinately,¹⁹ they demand in particular, the divine garments of counselors in the heavenly court. "Grant"²⁰ it, they say. A royal boon, one of an unlimited number to come, they say, without the slightest word of obligation on their part. The one who is the protector and provider of the weak and defenseless is to become a slave captive of his mortal advisors. Those who are under the protection of the LORD of History are to be abandoned by political glory-seekers who are blind to any outcry but their own. Their insolence in this blistering passage is clear by unending string of adversative postpositives.²¹ Jesus

¹⁷Not "reply" which might suggest agreement.

¹⁸πολήσω "prepare" or "do" which is synoptically paired with ἡτοίμασται of v. 40.

¹⁹Cf. the postpositive δὲ.

²⁰Δός, an imperative command, not a request.

²¹Jesus contends with both demands but compare the postpositive in v. 36 with the antithetical situation with the son of Timaeus (v. 51)

accuses²² them of self-delusion and blindness,²³

You know not what you have asked for yourselves.²⁴
Mark 10:38aß

and links their blindness to a pair of death symbols by which chaos in the world is brought to a halt and justice reestablished.

"Have you power to drink the cup which I shall drink, or to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized?"
Mark 10:38b

The synoptic pairing contrasts the cup whose contents are drunk internally under compulsion and the dipping of the whole body which is voluntary. One is a profound Old Testament symbol of destruction during the exilic period. The other is not an Old Testament symbol but a figurative expression in Greek Hellenism for going under or perishing.²⁵

a. The cup. The cup of God's wrath is an exilic symbol of judgment in history. God controls the destinies of nations and all the wicked of the earth shall drain the cup down to the dregs (Ps. 75:8). There is no favoritism. Jerusalem has drunk deeply of the cup and lies exhausted, depopulated and destroyed and now her oppressors will drink

where almost the identical phraseology occurs except for the non-adversative introductory reply formula "and answering him".

²²The postpositive.

²³Synoptically pair with son of Timaeus who already knows it and wishes to recover sight.

²⁴αἰτεῖσθε middle.

²⁵Albrecht Oepke, "βάπτω, βαπτίζω", Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), I, 530.

(Isa. 51:17-23). All nations, because of their transgressions, must suffer God's wrath, and their leaders are included (Jer. 25:15-28). The one who drinks from the cup of the wine of wrath will become confused, vomit, fall and rise no more because of the coming sword (Jer. 25:27). It cannot be refused: "You must drink!" (Jer. 25:28). Edom is reminded, "If those who did not deserve to drink the cup must drink it, will you go unpunished?" Babylon was the golden cup in the LORD's hand making all the earth drunken and the nations turn mad (Jer. 51:7). Those who rejoice at misfortune of others will also become drunk and strip themselves bare (Lam.4:4). The deep, large cup of horror and desolation that sister Samaria drank, Judah will drain completely and go raving mad because she did not learn and went the way of her sister (Ez. 23:31-34). It will be passed again to Jerusalem in the coming great day of the LORD (Zec. 12:2). The cup is in the LORD's right hand and those who request glory will receive shame instead (Hab. 2:16)! This is what James and John ask for themselves.

There is no escape from this cup of wrath, always connected with God's dealings with the unfaithful and unjust nations in history. It is also always closely identified to the destruction of Jerusalem, making the simultaneous appearance of a cup with another calamity symbol here in Mark 10, a horrifying and inescapable revelation for first century readers. When the cup of wrath is passed all the symbols and signs of God's presence is destroyed--land, kingdom, cities, temples. All reality is wiped away and stripped bare. All that is left is the naked weakness of the creature and the awesome reality of the power of the living God. This is the master the sons of Zebedee would rob

without fear.

Nor, in Mark itself is the cup any less an awesome symbol. There is the ironic mocking reference to unclean Pharisees who ritually purify themselves by the mere ritual cleansing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze in water (7:4).²⁶ But at the supper celebrating the passover Jesus invites his students to drain a cup that contains the "blood of the covenant"²⁷ poured out for many. In Gethesame's²⁸ agony Jesus asks Abba Father to remove the cup "yet not what I will, but what you will" (14:36). Finally, upon drinking from a sponge filled with sour wine--the produce of steward Israel's vineyard--he expires (15:36-37).²⁹

b. The baptism symbol. And if the cup of wrath symbol is not enough from a Hebrew literary tradition, it is contrasted with a baptism symbol that has primary roots in extra-biblical Greek where it is used for calamities, flooding, or overwhelming with misery, debts, etc.³⁰ It is not a primary Old Testament symbol, when used it is sometimes linked to ritual purifications.³¹

²⁶The synoptic link! In 7:4 the words RSV translates as "purification" and "washing" are βαπτίζονται and βαπτισμοῦς. A third dipping word is "wash themselves" νίψωται in the preceding verse (7:3).

²⁷Cf. Ex. 24:1-8, Lev. 1:5, Zec. 9:11.

²⁸Heb. lit. "oil vat" or "wine press"

²⁹Death by injustice.

³⁰Walter Bauer, A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 131. Cf. Oepke, pp. 529-546.

³¹Oepke, pp. 535-536.

In I Cor. 10:1-13 Paul fights a materialistic and superstitious estimation of baptism and the Lord's Supper which would have recipients set free from every possibility of divine wrath--which is in no wise a sacramental view.

In Mark 10 forms of the verb "to baptism" are repeated six times! Elsewhere in Mark all of Jerusalem and all of the people of Judea volunteer to be ritually dipped into the Jordan as if that would rid them of their sins and bring purification (1:4), but there is no genuine repentance. John the Baptizer says he ritually dips with water but Jesus baptizes in holy spirit (1:7). Jesus is indeed ritually dipped into the water by John, but the spirit comes down from heaven, not from the ritual water (1:10). It is the spirit that expels Jesus into the historical world where he must combat Satan, demons, and wild beasts to his death. In 7:4 there is the mocking reference with the cup and phony washing. In 11:30 the Pharisees are asked about whether the death of John was from heaven or from man, which they misunderstand. At the passover feast the one having dipped with Jesus into the bowl of wine (!) is identified with the unjust handing over (14:20). Finally, brought to Golgatha Jesus is offered wine from the vineyard mingled with a bitter embalming spice³² but he refuses to drink it.

There is nothing other-worldly in this contrast of cup and baptism in v. 38.³³ There is no damnation in another world, nor promise

³²Myrrh, and not the usual merciful frankincense.

³³Nor was it for Paul in I. Cor. 10:1-13 who speaks of historical baptism with Moses in the cloud and the sea.

of heaven. In his accusation that his chief students do not know what they are asking for themselves Jesus links the horrible destiny that results from ignoring justice with the superficial religion of ritual cleansing that pours water on the body while leaving the interior motives mean and festering. The cup and ritual cleansing are the synoptic antithesis to the tithe and the heave offering (first-fruits). The cup must be taken ("You must drink!" says Jeremiah) and innocent and guilty alike with suffer from transgressions. But death by ravaging internal motives, left untouched by ritual washing, is entirely voluntary. Even Jesus' death is voluntary, in that he submitted to the purification of the spirit--a free gift from heaven--and from obedience to pure motive went to death.

The sons of Zebedee claim to be able to avoid consequences--not accept them. "But (δὲ)," they argue obstinately, "We are powerful!"³⁴ They offer the colossal claim of all those who would deny the rule of justice in history. That which is destined for historical robbers and plunderers shall be avoided under the self-delusion of power. It is an amazing claim. They dispute the very messenger of the LORD of History. Inherent is the contention that God has no power that they cannot usurp or plunder for their own use. The self is the source of power, is another way of stating it. There is no need for God at

³⁴ Δυναμέθα from δύναμαι "I am powerful" or "I am able". "Able" in English is a weak abstraction with no suggestion of power as in the Greek. Cf. the same root in ἐνδυναμῶ "I endue with power" or "make strong"; δύνάτος "powerful" or "possible"; and ἀδύνατος "impossible". Cf. v. 27.

all. Slaves can rob masters of power and become masters themselves. It is the most self-deceitful of self-contradictions. It is rooted in apostasy--the contention that God does not exist. "We are the measure of all things." "Consequences may be escaped." "We can do whatever we want." "We are gods."

Again not replying but contending (v. 39b) Jesus throws in sharp relief the utter absurdity of their argument. Using the emphatic forms of "I", Jesus says that which they pretend to escape he (the innocent one) is already drinking and (the obedient one) has already been totally immersed and neither will they escape the consequences of historical acts (v. 39).

The stirring climax:

"But (δὲ) to sit at my right hand³⁵ or my left³⁶
is not mine to grant
but (ἀλλ')³⁷ it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

Jesus, the messenger, says the greedy desire to mislead God and control his governance over humanity is not a wish of the type that can be granted freely as in a "boon". Heavenly teachers are those who have first to be refined and purified by that which prepares the way of the LORD.

³⁵"The cup in the LORD's right hand will come round to you and shame will come upon your glory" (Hab. 2:16b).

³⁶εὐωνύμων "left" is not the same word as the "left" (ἀριστερῶν) requested by the two in v. 37. The former denotes evil omen and the only other instance of its usage in Mark is 15:29 when two robbers have the honor of being with him "one on the right and one on his left" (εὐωνύμων)!

³⁷The emphatic form.

Those who would steal devoted things--such a ghastly lust to become gods! The claim to absolute sovereignty over self and others is a denial that there is any order to history, that after all, justice and mercy are at the whim and caprice of the most clever of mortal men. It is a claim that the power of the world sits on thrones, in oval offices, or with four stars, with symbols of power, not given by God, but awarded by merit or force of arms.

But the conclusion of this acrimonious debate is the declaration that greed, the motive force of power, contains the seeds of its own dissolution. Jesus says God alone, preserver and defender, sovereign over all, has power and honor in history which no other may finally appropriate for themselves without destruction.

What thunder in such few words. A theology here of greed and lust for power! Poor mindless, blind humanity, with the cup of wrath, the flood of catastrophe about to be unleashed here, there, and across the planet--and yet we demand the divine to ever heel to our desires and rob humanity and God himself of a garment that is not ours to wear.

2. Robbed of Fear by his Authority (vv. 41-45).

⁴¹And having heard, the ten began to be indignant with James and John. ⁴²And having called them to himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who seem to rule the nations lord it over them, and their great ones wield authority over them. ⁴³But it shall not be so among you; but whoever might wish to become great among you shall be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever might wish among you to be first shall be a slave to all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

The cosmic politics of power between master and slave is now substituted for the earthly politics of master and slave. If power is

founded solely in heavenly reservoirs how do earthlings use the authority that they are given?

Those who pretend to power use authority to tyrannize based on their twisted motive that recognizes no other power or authority but their own. That which is entrusted to earthly rulers, to preserve and protect, is perverted and God is robbed of any fear of his authority.

This is contrasted with the charge of the slave who is empowered to serve. The servant who serves all of his fellows is, of course, the greatest of the servants. The slave who is a slave of all humankind, obedient to their need of provision and protection, and who delivers it, is first of the slaves.

The cosmic servant is the obedient Son of Man that lives only to serve and make a gift of his life as a payment so that bound captives, slaves to foreign masters, may be manumitted and returned to the service of their true master.

In opening verse (v. 41) the "ands" (καὶ) reappear and are the basic copula connectors for the remainder of the scene. The ten other students, having heard the words, begin to be indignant with James and John.³⁸ Their reaction and later actions witness that they see no injustice to God. Their indignation means they believe themselves innocent, sharing no blame or culpability with their comrades and the lot of all humankind. There is no sobbing for the wretchedness of the common existence, robbed by the greed we are all caught up in. Theirs is the

³⁸A synoptic contrast with Jesus' indignation in v. 14. Formally, their indignation should not be for the right reasons.

indignation of self-righteous finger-pointers who see only self-deceitfully, over and around the logs in their own eyes. "See the maniacs Hitler and Stalin--I am not as one with them!"

"Having called them to himself" in v. 42 is a technical flag that elsewhere indicates the beginning of a new story or the primary sub-division of one.³⁹ Another flag in the verse is the historical present "he says" (λέγει) that elevates the remainder of the story from that time to a speaking to all historical time. The leaders of nations are about to be contrasted with the leaders of servant-slaves.

First he tells what the students already "know":⁴⁰

Those who seem to rule the nations lord it over them⁴¹
and their great ones wield authority⁴² over them.
Mark 10:42b

Here is a theology of alien authority, wielded under false pretenses on the world stage. What is known--what the students of history know--is that those who pretend to rule the societies organized around geocentric values make slaves of their people and pretend to be the sole masters of human life. They use every means at hand to exercise complete dominion and sovereignty over the exterior lives and thought of their people. Their "great ones"--those national heroes who have won the applause of the mob--wield despotic authority as if they were God himself. It would

³⁹ Cf. Mk. 3:13, 23; 6:7; 7:14; 8:1, 14 (frame); 12:43; 15:44.

⁴⁰ Antithetical to what the two leading students, James and John, did not know in v. 38.

⁴¹ κατακυριεύουσιν. In LXX this verb is nearly always used of the rule of an alien.

⁴² κατεξουσιάζουσιν could mean "tyrannize".

seem their authority to rule and order life however they might choose came magically, emanating dynamically whenever a despot seized control of a territory.⁴³ That is what the world views as sovereignty and authority. It is conferred, as Augustine says, "not by renunciation of greed, but by the increase of impunity."⁴⁴ It is authority wielded dictatorially without the fear of any sovereign higher than themselves.

We go back to Pedersen, to get insight on how this idea of wielding authority occurred in the Hebrew culture. Originally the chief acquired honor by counseling wisely, providing for the needs of the weakest, and fighting battles to insure the protection of the rights of all under his charge. The more he gave the more honor he acquired and the moment he stopped giving, stopped upholding others, his honor and blessing ceased. The change came, Pedersen said, when honor in the new town culture became a demand for "possessions" instead of giving and upholding:

The great is no longer a counselor. The man of the new type first and foremost thinks of maintaining himself. He wants to rule rather than to counsel. He becomes great by humiliating others, not by raising them. He wants to have the honour and enjoy it by letting others give without giving anything himself. Therefore he does not fight, like the Israelites of the older type, in order to grow through the combat and to maintain his actual greatness. He

⁴³Augustine says, "And so if justice is left out, what are kingdoms except great robber bands? For what are robber bands except little kingdoms?" He describes how bands of criminals seize cities and territories laying claim to the title of kingdom. The answer which a captured pirate gave to the celebrated Alexander the Great was perfectly accurate and correct. "When the king asked him what he was thinking of, that he should molest the sea, he said with defiant independence: 'The same as you when you molest the world! Since I do this with a little ship I am called a pirate. You do it with a great fleet and are called an emperor!'" Augustine, The City of God Against the Pagans, IV, 4.

⁴⁴Ibid.

prefers to avoid fighting, and if he must, then the chief thing for him is not to measure himself against the enemy and to become the greatest, but to achieve a result; to obtain dominion, to crush the enemy.

Such claims are put forward by the despot, who is first and foremost thinking of his own greatness, desiring to take rather than to give. With this claim corresponds the humbleness of the lesser. He must give all, subject himself entirely to the strong. With the love of dominion of the great corresponds the fear of the lesser. He has no independent honour to maintain, but must trust to the mercy of the stronger. He must often gain his end by wiles, always turn aside; for him fighting is out of the question; he cannot openly maintain his cause, but achieves prosperity and progress by throwing himself before one who is greater. But this prosperity is sufficient to him; however gained, it is his self-maintenance, and all prosperity and self-maintenance is to him identical with honour. The honour is in the result, in the thing acquired.⁴⁵

So this is the milieu under which the Gentile despots are born. The common life must have been unbelievably wretched in ancient world, as it is yet today under contemporary slaveries of some religious and secular idealists. And Egyptian nobleman's epitaph boasts that he was never flogged with whips before the magistrates. "A tyrant disturbs ancient laws," Herodotus writes, "violates women, kills men without trial." He tells of a very rich noble of Lydia who set a sumptuous feast before the Persian despot Darius, entertaining not only the king, but his courtiers and a host of his soldiers as well. In return he begged humbly that one of his five sons, all in the army, might stay with him. "You make such a request?" said the king. "You who are my slave and bound to give me all that is yours, even to your wife?" He ordered the body of the eldest youth to be cut in two and placed on either side of the road where the army was to pass. In another story

⁴⁵ Johannes Pedersen, Israel (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), I, 225.

a noble who had lost favor with the king dined with him. After the feast of meat he was presented with a covered basket that contained the head and hands and feet of his only son. "Do you know now," the king asked pleasantly, "the kind of animal you have been eating?" The nobleman answered with the composure of a slave who knows he has no rights to claim: "I do know, indeed--and whatever the king is pleased to do pleases me."

This is how sovereignty appears to those who seem to rule the Gentiles whose dieties stand apart from the world of time and event. It appears that cruelty and meanness is the sovereignty and authority that rules over historical events. But not so, Mark has Jesus say (v. 43). They are usurpers. Robbers, plunders, pretenders. And he denies such exercise of authority among his followers who seek justice.

What kind of authority are his followers to have? They are to have only the commission of the slave that upholds in the master's household. There is no obsequious meekness of the household slave tidying up a bit and jumping at the slightest sound. There is no hint of timidity here, running up and falling on one's face in show of feigned humility, seeking favor, and reward, as the fawning richmen do their masters. This is the slave who is quick to hear and respond to the call of the God of battles, who without hope of booty, fame or conquest, may risk even death for the hope of extension of the master's wishes of justice and mercy to the farthest reaches of his lands and estates. The nature of the slave is to serve. With diligence his commission may be added to and he entrusted with ever more responsibility. He has no power or authority of his own. He mediates the wishes of his master and translates

them into historical action. The one who is a servant of those he loves is the great one among them (v. 43). The one who has demonstrated the ability and obedience to uphold the master's household is the first slave in the household (v. 44).

So there it is. The praise and applause of fellow slaves is a hollow honor. He has honor in the eyes of his master only, who himself is honored because he has an obedient slave. Whoever would uphold the honor of God among leaders of the world would be the servant of those leaders. And whoever might wish to uphold God's honor among all peoples, must be a slave to them. A slave to the least widow and orphan and sojourner! Fearful of injustice, willing to give service to the least, to give glory in obedience to the master. It is an instruction to deny and refuse the illusion of self-power, self-authorizing action, and find meaning in life by returning to one's true nature as created originally by the divine progenitor, of upholding the rights of all others.

Such a profound theology of the use of power and authority in history has been lost to the sight of the greedy contemporary world, but never lost entirely from the sight of the ancients. The ancient Greeks were certain that in some way divine justice was the power and authority that ruled the world. In Thucydides treatise on the cause of wars⁴⁶ he finds the cause of all of them to be the motive power of greed. Of the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta, which he wrote about,

⁴⁶Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War.

Edith Hamilton said,

The war had nothing to do with differences in ideas or with considerations of right and wrong. Is democracy right and the rule of the few over the many wrong? To Thucydides the question would have seemed an evasion of the issue. There was no right of power. Power, whoever wielded it, was evil, the corrupter of men.⁴⁷

Solon also saw greed as power worked out in evil:

Men are driven on by greed to win wealth in unrighteous ways, and he who has the most wealth always covets twice as much.⁴⁸

Rebellion against divine justice was to be feared. Aeschylus wrote:

Gold is never a bulwark,
No defense to those who spurn
God's great altar of justice.⁴⁹

For Thucydides, the corner stone of all morality was regard for the rights of others. When that crumbled away catastrophe was drawing near. There was 27 years of war between Athens and Sparta and,

The cause of all these evils was the desire for power which greed and ambition inspire.⁵⁰

In Mark greed and power are not dangerous because they are "not nice", "naughty", or "might offend polite society", "sensibilities" or the "holy folks" of contemporary impoverished morality. They are instead, catastrophic wrong turnings, ghastly delusions that have no independent existence in reality. To hold such illusions leads as night to day, to

⁴⁷Edith Hamilton, *The Greek Way* (New York: Norton, 1930, 1943), p. 187.

⁴⁸Solon, frag. 3.

⁴⁹Aeschylus, *Agam.*, 328.

⁵⁰Thucydides, III, 83.

confusion, to wretched internal turmoil and violent eruptions. Once greed swallows injustice it is a rottenness and poison that cannot be entirely vomited or evacuated, destroying and humiliating the entire body. And when it comes upon whole nations the only antidote is to drain the intoxicating cup to its dregs, sending the whole globe reeling into estrangement, murder, and merciful death.

Worse--were that possible--it blinds us to the reality of history. Century after century may become lost in the shadows while a stumbling preoccupied humanity casts upon all events a framework of tragic illusion. Human nature has no inherent power and is destined to serve.

The antithetical cosmic nature and destiny is in v. 45. The Son of Man does not come seeking worshippers to fall upon their faces before him, but to serve the honor of the cosmic father, to ransom captive humanity, lost in its slavery to earthbound faiths, bound to self-destruction by self-deluding motives of greed.

The LORD's annointed is commissioned to service only:

'He will build my city and set my exiles free,
not for price or reward', says the LORD of hosts.
Isaiah 45:13b.

The Slave of the LORD will be persistent:

He will not fail or be discouraged
till he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his Torah.
Isaiah 42:4

He has no illusions about any power of his own:

For I am honored in the eyes of the LORD
and my God has become my strength--
Isaiah 49:5b

He trusts his true master absolutely:

Behold, the Lord GOD helps me;
who will declare me guilty?

Isaiah 50:9a

And he will pay the ultimate price of service, so that sight
of God's reality might be recovered.

B. ROBBED OF AWE IN GRANTING MERCY (vv. 46-52)

⁴⁶And they came into Jericho; and as he was coming out from Jericho;
and he was coming out from Jericho with his disciples and a great
crowd, the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting
beside the way. ⁴⁷Having heard that it is Jesus of Nazareth, he began
to cry out and to say, "Son! David! Jesus! Mercy! Me!" ⁴⁸And many
were rebuking him, in order that he might be silenced; but he cried
out all the more, "Son! David! Mercy! Me!" ⁴⁹And stopping, Jesus
said, "Call him." And they called the blind one, saying to him,
"Courage! Rouse up! He calls you." ⁵⁰But having cast off his mantle,
having sprung up, he came towards Jesus. ⁵¹And answering him Jesus
said, "What do you wish I might prepare for you?" But the blind one
said to him, "Rabbouni, that I might see." ⁵²And Jesus said to him,
"Go! your faith has made you well." And straightaway he recovered
his sight and followed him on the way.

The LORD of history has been robbed of his fear as master. He
has been robbed of his sovereignty in establishing justice and now the
world gone completely deaf, dumb, lame and blind to the Way, robs him of
the awe-inspiring sight of his wonderous mercy.

We are now at the climax of this magnificently structured complex.
Like a groaning Bach bass chord suddenly sounding, the underlying tragic
pathos for the scene is cast under the shadow of the stark opening

κῆρυμα:

And they came into Jericho.

Mark 10:46a

That word "Jericho" reverberates with mingled mortal dread and rejoicing. There were two antithetical events that echo in the depths of religious memory: the glorious victory of the LORD after a loud shout and the falling down flat of the walls, and the ingratitude of faithless Israel in responding to God's favor by stealing his honor for themselves. Mark, always synoptic, has dealt with the thievery of those who would make pretense to power. Now the structure calls for the antithetical victory. Yet the contrasting underscoring now is heavy with terror and portent. At least Achan repented! And Jericho is a forever accursed city whose foundations and gates may be rebuilt only at the cost of a first-born son and youngest son (Jos. 6:26). That in v. 46 Jericho has been rebuilt, with no repayment, must surely signal to the reader of the horror of an imminent ban and cosmically exacting price. The dread is deepened with the entry of the apostate students who have not repented, and the shock of the accompanying multitude⁵¹ polluting Judea, whose size is "great" (ἰκανοῦ).

The deepest note in the chord is the appearance of the offspring of a profane Gentile teacher Timaeus, teaching outside the destroyed city. His hideous name seems a mockery--Timaeus, Gk. lit. "highly esteemed". But here is a blind beggar. What a contrast to his rich, well born father who held the most important and honorable offices in his state, and had scaled the heights of all philosophy.⁵² So says

⁵¹ ὅχλου not λαός "holy people".

⁵² Plato, Timaeus, 20.

Socrates. But how far his son has fallen!

Now we know this is the Timaeus of whom Mark speaks. Synoptically it contrasts apostate figures⁵³ from Hebrew and Greek most sacred⁵⁴ literature. It contrasts plural "sons" with the singular. Both the Hebrew and Greek son-forms are used in each case.⁵⁵ The name etymologies fit.

Mark 10, as one might have noticed, is a cosmogony, in direct opposition and contrast to the cosmology outlined in Timaeus, where Timaeus speaks of the generation of the world and the nature of man. Glenn R. Morrow believes the subject matter and intent of Plato's unfinished trilogy, of which Timaeus is the beginning, can be inferred from the opening conversation:

On the previous day Socrates has given his three companions an account of the ideal state, and has expressed his desire to see this state brought out of the realm of abstraction and portrayed in action.⁵⁶

Feeling incapable of this he appeals to his three friends, and Timaeus is to go first. Morrow says the central theme of the trilogy is political:

It attacks the problem with which Plato was so deeply concerned in

⁵³In Jewish eyes and Greek eyes. The son of Timaeus as a beggar is a scandal to the Greeks. The contrast is with James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

⁵⁴Timaeus is a religious myth.

⁵⁵υἱὸς and βῆρ-.

⁵⁶Glenn R. Morrow, "Introduction" in Plato, Timaeus (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1949), p. viii.

his later years--how to translate his political ideals into living historical reality.⁵⁷

And it begins with a cosmology. And this understanding of the world and humankind, that has so grasped the ancient and contemporary world by the throat, is refuted in Mark 10 and in majestic climax Ἰησοῦς is victorious over the son of Timaeus, who repents, in a supremely crafted vignette couched beneath cosmic clouds of Jericho's portent and doom.

It is beyond the scope of this inquiry to detail the conflict between Plato's Timaeus and Mark 10. But Plato denies knowledge, in the strict sense of the word, in the sense world of the historical. The only objects of knowledge are the cosmic Ideas. Timaeus finds the visible world a creation, made in the likeness of an eternal pattern, by a cause working for the best. An artificer, or craftsman (δημιουργός, "demiurge")--who is not omnipotent--brings orderly structure out of disorderly materials. The doctrine of Ideas is fundamental and history may be safely ignored. "No man is voluntarily bad," says Timaeus, Plato's mouthpiece, who asserts ill-temper, melancholy, rashness, cowardice, forgetfulness, and stupidity are caused by "an ill disposition of the body and bad education."⁵⁸ In the ideal state no one should ever know his own child, but are to imagine all as one family,⁵⁹ and the children

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Plato, Timaeus, 86e-87. The educators, rather than the educated ones, he says, are at fault.

⁵⁹Ibid., 18.

of good parents are to be educated and the children of the bad are to be secretly dispersed among the inferior citizens.⁶⁰ The ruler of this ideal state⁶¹ is not a transcendent LORD of History, but mortal guardians, and philosopher kings.

As usual, then, the opening period (v. 46) of the scene sets the historical narrative into a cosmic framework. Without that merging of time and space, the Timaeus event in Mark has no meaning beyond itself, and becomes a drowning swimmer lost in a vast historical sea of yesteryear.

As we are to proceed reading this richly loomed and finely orchestrated fugue, we are not to forget its synoptic contrasts with the earlier themes. Yes, there are the same forms--the general and particular requests, the response of the onlookers, the "What do you wish I should do for you?"--but how different! Every detail is etched in contrasts and antitheses.

James and John were always with Jesus, yet never knew him. And when they heard of the horrible slave death, they had no fear but blatantly and openly demand to become the executioners. Timaeus, having heard the report⁶² of whom was passing by, doesn't demand fortune, lands,

⁶⁰Ibid., 19.

⁶¹Not explicitly in Timaeus but underlying in Platonic thought, Cf. Plato, Timaeus, 18.

⁶²"Jesus of Nazareth" is not Mark's identification but carefully placed as a report of the crowd. Mark's own conception is in the Greek word that modifies "Jesus". The extensive disagreement among MS. witnesses is a tipoff to a unique puzzle in Markan linguistics. For now I prefer Ναζωραῖος, the witness of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, et la, and would translate it "belonging to the root". Cf. Mk. 1:9.

or inheritance like the other two blind beggars. Instead he "cries out" for mercy.⁶³ The Jewish apostates address a Greek "teacher", but the Greek Timaeus' vocatives hands himself over to the subjection of cosmic blood and sovereignty in Jewish history: "Son! David!" "'Ιησοῦ!" God's victorious mediator at Jericho. Unlike the sons of Zebedee--and the crowd--he knows who is passing by.⁶⁴ And his imperative cry for "mercy! me!" is the plea of the guilty at the bar of justice for undeserved leniency.

Earlier, the "ten" heard and were indignant. In v. 48 the response of the "many" was to attempt to exorcise⁶⁵ the evil from their midst as if the presence of the son of Timaeus and his shout identified the presence of chaotic, satanic, cosmic evil itself.⁶⁶

⁶³ Outcries in the Old Testament are appeals for justice and mercy. Cf. Greek philosophy. The Cynic Diogenes does not beg, he commands. When others obey it is because they are still slaves. Diogenes had no fear as only despicable slaves are afraid.

⁶⁴ Job wonders how a man can be just before God (Job. 9:2) and cries in anguish:

Lo, he passes by me, and I see him not;
he moves on, but I do not perceive him.
Behold, he snatches away; who can hinder him?
Who will say to him, "What doest thou"? (Job 9:11-12).

⁶⁵ ἐπετίμων. is a technical Markan term for exorcising evil, completely lost in RSV "rebuke". Here, the imperfect indicates their durative, continuing action.

⁶⁶ σιωπήσῃ aor. subj. "might silence", another technical term. In 4:39, the only other instance in Mark when σιωπήσῃ is linked with ἐπετίμων, it is Jesus that exorcises the wind and says to the sea: "Be silent! Be thou having been muzzled!" The sea symbol is cosmic evil in the Old Testament and muzzling or binding evil has roots tht go deep into antiquity. Historically speaking, Lake Gaililee, is never known as "sea". Use of σιωπήσῃ in the formal context here indicates the belief of the

Now we have the corruption nearing the nation's core. First the teachers and leaders were corrupted, and turn aside from the way, causing others to stumble. Then the students, having lost all guided touch with reality, are corrupted. And, finally, now the infestation is spreading among the populace. The extent of it is not yet pervasive--only "many"--but the judgment of human events has deteriorated to the point that cries for mercy are now seen as evil! International pity and oneness are no more. The perversion is almost complete.

Now the debate on the messenger's identity is between the son of Timaeus and the crowd!⁶⁷ Timaeus, guilty of unfaithfulness, stripped bare of honor, cries out all the more (v. 48b) in continuing staccato single word Greek vocatives and imperatives:

Son!
David!

Mercy!
Me!

One can only marvel at the anguish of this professor's son, still trying to teach beside the way,⁶⁸ yet in the shadow of his ruined city, who has caused so many to stumble, led so many devotees to drain the evil cup, who, when now fallen himself into garments of tatters, can suddenly awake, come to his senses, and in repentance, weeping, joy and pain, wrench from his soul, the longed for hosanna of true worship.

presence of cosmic evil that should be defeated and bound. Cf. also Mk. 3:4, 9:34, 14:61!)

⁶⁷The adversative postpositive δὲ!

⁶⁸"sitting beside the way". Still trying to teach Justice, but not yet "on" the road.

When life is in ruins and everyone is blaming it on you--branding you and all your thoughts as evil--it is a wonder that anyone can hold on and persist in the belief that justice and mercy may yet be found to rule the world. But what courage is this, when there is nothing left but foraging about among now accursed society. When the line of justice is upheld, he gets what he deserves, says the crowd, so blind themselves, and deaf to his plea. "Did not Timaeus himself⁶⁹ say children of bad parents are to be secretly scattered among the inferior citizens?" That is justice. So what more poignant "Mercy!" is there in all of literature?

The crowds ears are stopped but,

And stopping Jesus said,
Call! (aor. impv.)
Him!

Mark 10:49a

"Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; . . ." (Isa. 59:1)⁷⁰ Jesus hears the cries of recognition and guilty. He stops.⁷¹ (Can the Unmoved

⁶⁹Plato, Timaeus, 19.

⁷⁰Hellenistic sins have been forgiven! It was gross injustice that made a separation between Judah and God (the continuation in Isa. 59:2a). But it is "sins that hide his face from you so that he does not hear" (LXX "so as not to have mercy upon you"). It is the "b" half of Isa. 59:2 synoptically completing the link with the "a" half that explained the peril of those hindering children in Mk. 10:14. Cf. notes on v. 14.

⁷¹στᾶς etymologically connected with words meaning "to stand", "bystander", "standing still" ἵστημι. Cf. Mk. 3:24, 25, 26; 7:9; 11:5; 13:9, 14; 15:35.

Mover be stopped?) Not answering--the word is εἶπεν-- in context "he commands:" "Call! Him!"⁷²

In certainly, one of the most ludicrous of all turnabouts they call the blind one saying to him:

Courage! (impv.) (θάρσεε)
Rouse (up)! (impv.)

He calls
you.⁷³

Mark 10:49b

Yet there is ironical, tragic misunderstanding in this Old Comedy.

The popular Greek idea of courage (ἀνδρεία) in Timaeus' day was an important virtue in Greek philosophy, but allowed no place for humility or dependence on God.⁷⁴ Plato insists guardians of the city must possess this virtue above all others and should learn to acquire it by learning the difference between those things which ought to be feared and those which ought not be feared.⁷⁵

In Deutero-Isaiah's "trial of the nations" the God of History calls Cyrus, and the trembling nations, powerless as the blocks of wood they worship, say to each other "take courage" (Isa. 41:6).⁷⁶

⁷²The mercy! (cf. n. 70).

⁷³Continuing the rushing to conclusion Greek staccato meter.

⁷⁴W. W. Gasque, "Courage", in Interpreter's Bible Dictionary (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), Supp. Vol., p. 188.

⁷⁵Plato, Republic, IV, 7.

⁷⁶Cf. Gilbert Murray says the Cynics looked at life as one long and arduous campaign and, "What men wanted was to θαρρῆναι 'to be of good cheer'; as we say now, to regain their morale after bewildering defeats." Gilbert Murray, Five Stages of Greek Religion (New York: AMS Press, 1978), p. 122.

For the crowd to call the blind one to "rise up" is another instance of Old Comedy bitter irony. It's a command to rouse up--wake up--from the drunkenness of the cup of fury and see the reality of God's wrathful sword.⁷⁷ Here uttered meanly, but it is the crowd--not the son of Timaeus--that needs to see.

The action of the crowd could even be understood as a violation of Deut. 27:18 which curses those who would mislead a blind man. Why curse? Because they urge him to "courage" and not to "fear", to rouse from his own power and not from God's.⁷⁸

But (δὲ)⁷⁹ having cast of (ἀποβαλὼν) his mantle,
having sprung up, he came⁸⁰ towards⁸¹ Jesus.
Mark 10:50

Verse 50 contains the action abandoning one slavery and submitting himself to another. He exorcises himself of his evil.⁸² It is

⁷⁷LXX Isa. 51:17, 52:1.

⁷⁸That Mark spits on such courage see 15:14 when Joseph of Arimathea is able to summon up "courage" (τολμᾶω) only to go get a corpse.

⁷⁹The formal indicator of the scorn in the crowd's words as well as that his action is in opposition to them.

⁸⁰An aorist, following two aorist participles. Only after two actions does he approach Jesus.

⁸¹πρὸς, "towards", or "near", not τῷ suggesting he is already there.

⁸²"Having cast off", an aor. part. form of ἐκβάλλειν the technical Markan term for exorcism.

his mantle.⁸³ He casts aside all pretense to honor, leaps up⁸⁴ in instant obedience, having heard the call,⁸⁵ and only then, does the blind one⁸⁶ approach Jesus.

And answering⁸⁷ him Jesus said
What do you wish I should prepare?⁸⁸
Mark 10:51a

But the blind one makes no request:⁸⁹

But (δε) the blind one said to him
My master!
That I might see.

Mark 10:51b

Instead it is a supreme confession and only the context of a prideful Greek cosmology and the form⁹⁰ make clear that it is. Imagine, a son of Timaeus saying, "I sin!" The confession, again in two parts, begins with an address unlike any other in the chapter.⁹¹ Jesus is "Rabbouni", an Aramaic imperative⁹² "My Master." Its form, unified in a single

⁸³"Honor must appear in garments worn," says Pedersen, p. 227. Cf. Isa 3:6: ". . . You have a mantle; you shall be our leader, and this heap of ruins shall be under your rule." Also Job 19:14, Isa. 11:5. In Mk. 14:63 chief priest rends only his tunic.

⁸⁴Cf. Isa. 38:6a. ⁸⁵Cf. Isa. 38:5b. ⁸⁶Cf. Isa. 38:5a.

⁸⁷No postpositive! Jesus hears and answers. Cf. the synoptic v. 36a.

⁸⁸πολιτω, cf. Greek words and order in synoptic v. 36b.

⁸⁹Note the adversative postpositive! But how sublimely different. He will not make a slave of his master.

⁹⁰Cf. the contrasting use of postpositives in the synoptic sons of Zebedee story.

⁹¹Cf. absence of address in vv. 2, 28; "teacher" in vv. 17, 35.

⁹²See the plunging depth of submission implicit in the use of the Aramaic vernacular (not even the classical Hebrew) for the Greek cosmologist, philosopher-king.

word,⁹³ contains the address of a master and the admission that one is a personal slave. Then, contrasting with the apostates particular demand to become divine counselors, is Timaeus particular confession cast in an aorist subjective, indicating doubtful contingency: ἔνα ἀναβλέψω⁹⁴ "that I might recover sight". There is no hope here that one might be rewarded. In the context, it is the illumination of horror which in tragic suffering, a moral beggar sees the true bankruptcy of his life.

It is the only confession in the chapter. In each cameo crafted by Mark, the onlooker grasps with ever-progressing horror of one historical action of apostasy after another, each, from the Torah itself, grounds for the ban. And, now, with Jerusalem ahead, the son of the great Gentile evil itself.

Comes the shocking climax:

⁹³Impossible in Greek.

⁹⁴In Phaedrus Socrates troubled by his dialog lest, as Ibsycus says 'I be buying honor among men by sinning against the gods,' realizes he has sinned against Love. Wishing to avoid punishment he says he must purify himself by an ancient purification. He tells of Steisichorus, stricken with blindness for speaking ill of Helen, who, immediately after writing a poem called the 'recantation' ἀναβλέψεν saw again at once. Socrates likewise recants of his sin and atones with his head bare, though covered with shame. Plato, Phaedrus, 242c-243.

See again the complaint of Job, "Lo, he passes by me, and I see him not; . . ." (Job. 9:11a).

Also Herodotus' tale of an Egyptian king who became blind for ten years after throwing a spear into a raging and flood-swept Nile. He recovered his sight after an oracle advised him to wash his eyes in the issue of blood from a faithful woman. Herodotus, History, II, 111.

And Jesus said to him

Go!

Your faith has and is continuing to make you well.⁹⁵
And straightaway⁹⁶ he recovered his sight
And followed him on the Way.

Mark 10:52

"Go!" The primeval history is over. The promise of old to beget many generations is renewed. And it is faith--not tribe, nor merit--that did it!

Faith is identified with sight, coming after abject repentance, abandonment of all hope of honor of self, and an inward purification of motive to give service to an absolute "other" master whose guidance and desires are to be instantaneously obeyed. Faith is identified with "awe" of the Judge of all the Earth, not of men. Faith implies more than a mere assertion of belief, which, in fact, profanes true faith. According to v. 52b and the action of the son of Timaeus, there is obligation and it is total. There is the obligation of total loyalty and submission to the absolute sovereignty of the living God, as opposed to the submission to the symbols men have devised of God, or submission to the exalted ideas of humankind. There is--contained in the word "Rabbouni"--obedience to the teachings of the Master, which cannot but obligate the servant to the extension of justice and mercy in the historical world to the far coastlines. It is not provincial or closed, but international. Faith here obligates one to pain, mocking, hatred,

⁹⁵ σέσωκέν perf., Note the ambiguity of meaning ("well", "saved") with Jericho in the background.

⁹⁶ εὐθύς, Markan technical word for ingressive spirit impelled.

while seeking to obey.

Faith implies blind "Going!" onto the way of justice without being able to see what is ahead. Going comes first, before faith, but after repentance. Like the imperative "Go!" that Yahweh commanded Abraham (Gen. 12:1), the confessing slave is commanded to leave his father's house, his kindred, and all that would possess him, proceeding forward only in the hope that God is his portion, God's judgment, knowledge, wishes, is the inheritance. In faith one goes to find new mothers, and brothers, and sisters, and houses, and lands, and persecutions with no hope of vindication in history.

Finally, faith is a Greek perfect (σέσωκέν). It is not something acquired punctiliar in the past, as a Greek aorist. Nor is it a possession that may be automatically retained without obligation or renewal into the future, like a Greek future. It is a perfect, indicating faith occurs in past time and is continuous into the present, but only to the moment the Speaker is speaking. It does not proceed beyond. Timaeus' faith began in his own abject total repentance. But Jesus doesn't promise that God can be forced into rewarding benefits of faith and projecting it forward. (His disciples proved that!) Faith's existence is always open to question as to when and if it is present. It is present in true repentance, but no one may define that repentance. God alone is the judge. The perfect is a scandal to those who dare not in every moment open their eyes to the possibilities of ghastly evil within, cast off honor, and return again to the motive of surrender, obedience, and upholding service to the least of God's children.

This is the commandment and pronouncement of history that is

such a hard word. To see the action of God in history is problematic without the repentance of the son of Timaeus. Return to me and I will return to you, says the LORD. Sight of God cannot be boxed in a mental catalogue or book and sealed with a forever padlock. That would make faith a piece of material--an achievement, one time or one time for all time--that can be stuffed through the narrowest of gateways. God is seen only in every moment of history. We cannot escape the woe of our blindness.

Faith is not the subject of Mk. 10. Honor of God is the subject. And faith is the honor. Here is no reward to meritorious self, but terrible price: payment paid to historical time to recover sight of God in the limited and partial world of humankind. Yet faith may be a part of a larger complex, not yet recovered to sight in Mark. We have witnessed only a cosmogony, incapsulated within human events. From catastrophic and absolute sin and destruction, coming in mystery and grandeur, ex nihilo, faith is born, coming into the world.

With chapter 10 we leave a world and a composition organized around space and enter a new world, organized around temple and time. As for the son of Timaeus, in v. 52b "straightaway" (εὐθὺς)⁹⁷ he recovers his sight and the Word thrusts him in following⁹⁸ the LORD in the mutual unending quest for justice and mercy along the way.

The beginning is at once the end. God's creative purposes cannot be denied. The helpless exile, an exhausted prisoner, receives

⁹⁷The εὐθὺς indicates the receipt of the impelling Word, a Markan safeguard that faith cannot be wrested from the control and gratuitous favor of God by a partial human philosophy or theology.

⁹⁸ἡκολούθει, imperfect. Durative action in past time.

new courage and hope, purified and passing redeemed on the Holy Way,
returning to Zion, with singing.⁹⁹

⁹⁹Cf. Mk. 11:1-10, fulfilling the last of Isaiah's eschatological predictions (Isa. 36:6b).

Chapter VI

ILLUMINATING THE SIGHT OF GOD TODAY

A. LOST IN DELUSION AND SYMBOL

We have eyes to see but see not;
we have ears to hear but hear not.
Ezekiel 12:2

In Mark 10 Jesus gives to posterity a guide to the seeing of God's reality in history. In its historical setting, it gives meaning to the destruction of Jerusalem. The nation divorced itself from seeing reality in history. Children grew up hindered in seeing it. And through self-delusion the secular and religious leaders forgot their mission to provide the sight of it and fight to protect clear vision. Instead the whole nation wedded themselves to other masters, mocking humiliating, punishing, and attempting to destroy that which was their true provider and protector. Religious leaders sought divine political powers for themselves and secular despots went rampant wielding the authority issuing from their own delusions of mastery. The final tragedy came when the corruption filtered down to the populace and many began to blind themselves to reality by self-mastery, twisting good into evil and evil into good, at last turning cruelly against the weakest of all and misleading them. The sight of God is finally recovered when alien professors repent of their delusions, cover their head with shame and ashes, and prepare to walk with reality again through the coming refining, cleansing destruction. The chapter ends with reunion and pity purified by tragedy.

It is holy teaching for then and today. The prophets tried to recover the sight of reality in history. The Exile was the occasion for a great creative burst, born out of suffering, to rediscover transcendent reality. Their Gentile contemporaries, men like Thucydides and Plato suffered from the horror of Hellenic wars and attempted to patch-work together some lasting meaning. Before them, Homer and Hesiod had tried.

After Mark and the canonical writers, Saint Augustine writes the City of God for an old civilization shocked by the ravishment of Rome by the Goths. Theological bursts seeking meaning to history exists in the present age, arising again from the catastrophe of war and the disillusionment with the evil produce of the Enlightenment. Reason, education and progress were deified as redemptive, but war and human evil continued. Barth, Bultmann, Von Rad, the American Neibuhr brothers--none of them were born above and beyond their historical situation.

Yet today in our churches and in our society the sight of reality largely remains obscured. In our churches we have escaped the reality of God in history by deifying symbol. It is the self-deceiving view that largely finds religion as a fiction, useful to society or to our personal well-being. Religion becomes,

. . . no longer a relationship of man to God but a relationship of man to the symbol of his highest ideals: there is no God, but we must go on worshipping his symbol.¹

Heschel says ancients regarded symbolism merely as an aid to "religious

¹Abraham J. Heschel, Man's Quest For God (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), p. 128.

thinking", but contemporary civilization has twisted it and made "religion" merely an aid to "symbolic thinking".²

The premise of religious symbolism is the assumption that God lies beyond the ken of our minds and will, therefore, never be apprehended or expressed directly but only through symbol.³

Symbolism is a trap, says Heschel. It's alluring,

Yet, what it accomplishes is to reduce belief to make-believe, observance to ceremony, prophecy to literature, theology to literature.⁴

Symbols become aesthetic objects. They please the senses and demand nothing in return. They trade insight and immediate perception into a substitutionary alibi for faith.⁵

But those who have witnessed to the hand that was not their own moving in history, refused to go the way of the symbol. That which they witnessed was real. They were not tempted to avoid the reality of murder, destruction, war--the injustice of their times--by escaping into symbol. That is how the East and the non-historical religions escape reality. Injustice in history is not faced. It is denied. The powerlessness, the absolute bankruptcy of human pretensions is hidden in delusion. The East does it by divorcing God from history openly. The West does it covertly, under a coy, self-descriptive sentimentality that recognizes God only when he can be our slave. The reality of life in our world becomes more than we want to face and we find a refuge in sentimentalizing it and hiding behind symbol.

It is in prayer that we are found out. How do you pray to a

²Ibid., p. 129.

³Ibid., p. 130.

⁴Ibid., pp. 142-143.

⁵Ibid., p. 141.

symbol?

What we need is recovery of sight of God, rather than new symbols, new gimmicks, new programs. Reduce symbol to guide, not deity. The reality of life includes problems that are harsh and bitter: ignorance, evil, malice, power, agony, despair. These are issues Jesus in Mark suffers with. He suffers not symbolically but deeply. Mark does not give us symbols, instead he marshals a tapestry of images to guide us to the sight of the Living Reality that orders all of history.

B. RECOVERY IN A BLINDED WORLD

The church today mirrors the human condition, lost in blindness, seeking to recover sight of the Transcendent Reality of History, and the moral visioning of a way to travel.

What shall the church teach? We should teach blindness. We should again teach lostness and profound need to see. We should again teach powerlessness and our absolute lack of self-authority. We should again teach the obligation of providing and the price of protecting. We should recover worship as the meeting place between heaven and earth where with pure offering we can confess our blindness and purify our motives. But most of all, we should teach blindness.

Who can deny that the cup of wrath is being drained to the dregs all over the planet? Nations are staggering in confusion. Youth begs for a visionary reality to serve, but in the eyes of many instructors, sight of the transcendent has already perished. Secular masters are elevated everywhere, enslaving the weak and strong alike, including great portions of the church itself.

We protest, "But we have love of God?" Mark says, "Then where is the 'fear'? If there is no awe or fear of the Reality of History, how can we say there is true "love" of God? Mark 10 and history itself testifies that when whole nations have no fear of God, love of anything beyond the idol, vanishes. O woe is us! Not just nations, now it is the whole planet that has begun to totter. We fear the bomb, for our own security and possessions, but not God. If, as Moses says, we had followed justice and only justice, there would be no poor. We are deceived. And we ourselves have done it.

How can we teach blindness? Perhaps we can begin by recovering some of the reality to the values we lost sight of. Thucydides writes about the time when the very meaning of words changed. So today have great segments of the church--its teachers and students--lost sight of the full depth of meaning of once powerful values: confession and repentance, good and evil, Torah, justice and mercy, power and authority, sovereignty, worship and others. They have largely become empty symbols for the impoverished to bite on.

1. Confession and repentance. Mark talks about empty and genuine confession and repentance. In Mk. 1 all of the once holy people poured out of Jerusalem and, yes sir, from all of Judea--every last one of them--and they got ritually cleansed. The dirt on the outside got scrubbed up and they sparkled like whitewashed tombs on the outside while their evil motives festered like sun-ripened corpses on the inside. Yet, Mark 10 says genuine confession and repentance goes to the core of life. The sinner sees his participation in all of society's evil, all of the injustice, all of the pain and anguish of the one anointed body.

When one Jew is thrown into the ovens, every heart that loves God must feel tragic pangs as if God's own self were the one consumed and we were responsible. In my own church, we wear our Sunday best and march up to the front of the church and "confess", "I believe Jesus is the Christ, the son of the Living God, and I accept Him as my personal savior." That is not far from a popular contemporary understanding of religious confession which ignores the God of history. It is an assent to belief that costs us only a trifling amount of lip energy to utter. But do our people understand what true confession is any more? Where are the true offspring of Levi that are teaching them? Yes, I know of some who are pretending to teach it--teach confession as a way to hogtie God and buy our way out of historical responsibilities with a promise of goodies in a never-never paradise. And I know of confession of personal injustice in a booth or at a rail, but that is not what makes the son of Timaeus' heart heave and soul wrench.

What happened to the confessing church? Some have it on their shingle. But, I mean, does it really exist in reality. The whole church, I believe, must once again become the repentant, confessing supplicant. Too often we have demanded justice for others without repentance of our own sins. By refusing to repent the church has, in fact, taught self-righteous, meritorious justice seeking. It is we who have sprinkled the holy water on the way of totalitarian cult by sending out teachers and preachers to do moral justice battles without self-exorcism. On the Day of Atonement the Jewish priest used to confess his own sins and the sins of his family before confessing the sins of his people. How far we have fallen.

2. Sin. A funny thing happened to sin on its way to the twentieth century. It got taken over by those followers of Greek thought who masqueraded as Christians in order to preach other-worldly hellfire and this-worldly microscopic historical morality. And we let them. Yet in Mark 10 impure motive turns one to greed and lust for possession, power over others, resulting finally in moral slavery, war, and catastrophic destruction. Have we lost all obligation to alert humanity to that which threatens to destroy us? Shall we continue to leave our people ignorant and defenseless because we don't like how pseudo-religionists twist sin into pettiness? Do we dare preach on it, write literature about it, create theologies of history about it? "Power corrupts" is a cute little moralism to throw away in a one-liner. But alas for a whole century of Hitlers, Stalins, Cambodias, Afghanistans, Gulag Archipelagoes, Mei Leis, and dictators. Who is going to stand toe to toe with the morally irresponsible and say once again that sin is not the thought of primitives, but the witness of suffering humanity to what destroys any hope of justice and mercy in history. Who is going to say once again, that "Yes, there is a jealous God", who like the gods of the tragedians, were always jealous of their prerogatives when humans invaded their spheres and robbed and defrauded them of their love, honor, awe and fear. The price of self-deification is historical destruction of innocent and guilty alike.

3. Law (Justice and Mercy). How many in the churches are giving our hungry people some solid instruction about the nature of justice and how it differs from legalism? Torah has been twisted from its roots. Its guidance was to flower into life-giving justice and mercy. Now the

law is like the rich man in Mark would have it: something to be "kept". If the law is "kept", the witness of Mark is that it has already been disregarded. It must be given away. Where in our contemporary church life is the focus on the profound good intention of the law, as a gift for those already too calloused in their sensitivities to see? Why are the ten commandments set to narrative? What does that mean? If you have "guarded for yourself" the commandments, have you really done the wish of God and those who mediate his law on earth? The Pharisees in Mark are always taking a phrase out of narrative context and holding it over Jesus. Today's society, blind to historical action, holds law as something no one can be above. Who is providing the legal theory for our lawmakers and lawyers? The secular legalists are! The theologians are in their temples. Why have they not left their sanctuaries and done their duty? Shall we leave the law to Washington and Sacramento and corporate sleight-of-handers? There is terrible peril in store for a society that replaces sight of God's justice and mercy with legalism. When the people are left defenseless, the despots devour.

4. Responsibility. How can we recover responsibility by continuing to hide the reality of the consequences in history of human irresponsibility? History is stewn with the wreckage of civilization after civilization who worshipped despotic self and refused to uphold the helpless and weak. Wherever I turn, I seem to hear those who say, how can we teach responsibility? Have we forgotten the lesson of Mark? Does not the curse of chapter eleven follow ten? Is thirteen a secular work? Do we no longer sow what we reap? Is the sower of Mark 4 a comic invention to fool tiny tots? Does anyone any longer reap the

whirlwind? The LORD of History is on the march delivering his cup in Asia, Africa, Europe, South America, and coming up Mexico on his way here! Is there nothing going on in the world today that cannot be seen? Is there no one around today to put some of these events in context with the witness of those who arranged historical complexes in our sacred literature? Let us recover responsibility as we recover our worship. Before we teach we must ourselves confess our own impiety, so near and so close to the altar and table. That which was to allow mortals to draw close to God we have permitted to be polluted. We have allowed our people to bring up their torn and injured throwaway beasts and offer that again to the LORD. We have not brought to sight the full value of tithes and heave offerings, about obligation, stewardship, fidelity and loyalty. "And bless the gift and the giver" we like to say, as we mock the poor and the helpless.

5. Politics and Masters. Mark talks about the role of the despot who made slaves out of his people. What is "authority" and which "master" do we serve? What is the role of the political leader who serves as mediator under the commission of God's authority? What is there about them that makes them "sons of God" or "shepherds" of their flocks. The Puritans, at least, used to preach "Election Sermons" teaching political thought to their congregations. Now we sometimes use our pulpits and classrooms to teach how to be nice to grandma, avoid sibling rivalry (Esau-Jacob!) and, for the truly skillful, enrich our marriages! No wonder the children are fleeing from the house of God. The deep thinking required for the realities of life are being held captive by those who would make a slave of them for their own religious

purpose of avoiding spits and sparks.

Let us begin again, with Mark and others, to identify the powerful and the powerless, the ones who have authority by commission and the ones who do not. Always prophets, including Mark, has unmasked the idols that pose as deity. Science and reason, when deified, as they are in contemporary society, must be defrocked as non-redemptive slave-traders. The current worship of astrology and astronomy is rooted in the ancient faiths of Thales and all sons of Timaeus who seek redemption from some original material instead of any moral visioning. The Niebuhrs and others have plowed deep theological furrows to recover the good seeds. But where are the cultivators, vinedressers skilled in apologetics for the propagation of understanding the LORD of History? Did the labour of the Fathers teach us nothing? Is the Master of the World boarded up and hidden among the enclaves of the pretensions of those who claim faithfulness? Can we not invade again the sanctity of the secular and debate honestly and forthrightly, as did the more diligent ones of old? On the college and university campus today who are unmasking the secular idols? Who is saying there is more reality to be seen in the suffering of the deaf and the dumb and the lame and the blind, than in all the dreams of Plato?

We have entered into politics but forgotten our role is to teach it. We know the secular masters and when we say so at all it is often very, very quietly. We take out after the Nixons, Carters or Reagans, but the real secular rulers--the deluded ideals deified by our

congregations, self and society--we largely leave alone.⁶ We have even turned secular wrong turnings over to the religious theorists who sell millions of copies of books publicizing versions of "the last days". That's how hungry people are for making some sense out of these times. At least false pattern projectors have been sensitive enough to the suffering about them to see that the people want and desperately need a larger context for understanding of life's tragic injustices. And, if there is such a thing as reckoning in history, shall we hide it until the mountains overtake us?

C. SOME POSSIBLE SOUL-OPENING STEPS

I see little hope that the reality of God in history can be recovered for vast tracts of humanity unless the church convinces itself that it has largely lost sight of God and followed other visions. There is no way a righteous church can change. Only the sinful church can change. There can be no confession if we are convinced our present path, our current views are righteous and justified. When we believe ourselves

⁶Full or partial deification of family, nation, western civilization, or any societal grouping; Marxism, capitalism, or any economic system; political party, system, document or philosophy; science, psychoanalysis, or peace of mind therapy; religion, theology, or religious institution; theory, principle or system, including those half-deities such as truth, beauty, freedom, law, the Good. To the degree we deify these as redemptive, the vision of God in history perishes. Cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture (New York: Harper & Row, 1943), pp. 1-92. Also Will Herberg, Judaism and Modern Man (New York: Atheneum, 1951), pp. 3-41. Both of these texts clarify that whatever the heart clings to, as Luther said, is properly a God.

never fundamentally wrong, that eliminates the possibility of repentance, of turning around. Only when we discover the shock of our moral lostness--as did the son of Timaeus--can we be brought to any sensitivity to the call of the LORD of History.

How did the confessing German church find change? It confessed its own lostness and participation in the tragedy of its time. If the American church at large, the denominational apparatus, the local church, and the laity are not broken-hearted at the terrible realities of the twentieth century, the steps I would propose are meaningless and are worthy of ridicule. Every step presumes personal and corporate blindness and need to see.

Fundamentally the repentant church can teach blindness by confessing and specifically demonstrating that the visions we have followed--the secular idols--are blind alleys leading to destruction. We need to teach that every pattern we ourselves impose upon events diminishes the sight of God's true activity. Life's realities tend to be avoided. Perhaps they are too harsh for us to face, therefore, in search for meaning, rejecting the transcendent, we turn to the idealistic or sentimental pattern. "Well, here is something solid and concrete," we can say, but the truth is that it gives us a delusive way to say that the real has nothing to do with anything our senses perceive. When the objective becomes our standard, the general, the non-concrete, the abstraction becomes our rule. And sense perceptions--history--drops from sight. But the two-fold world--the timeless breaking into the stream of historical events--is what needs to be seen. Yet that timelessness, is not our objective imaginings, but the nature and destiny of transcendent

reality.

1. The Religious Publication.

In Mark the glad tidings of God's reality are repeatedly twisted into false reports that mislead the multitude into continuing to follow the desires of their own hearts. The religious publication, including the book publisher and the periodical, is the contemporary herald. It is in the best position to provide the depth of thought to stimulate the pastor and the layperson, as well, as to begin the apologetic debate with secular society.

The religious publication, including denominational journals can be intentional in 1) identifying and unmasking secular idols, 2) demonstrating connections between isolated events, 3) probing deeply into human events and identifying hubris in human events, and 4) recovering valuation of both the Old Testament and New Testament as witness guides to the LORD of History.

a. The dominant secular spirit has blocked the return to the transcendent. Therefore, the secular idols must be identified and shown to be the unmistakable blocks of wood they are. A good place to start is to demonstrate the fruits of the enlightenment, the deification of Reason, and where it has taken us.

b. The religious publication can help us to rediscover the whole, the connected flow to isolated events. The fragments are what leave us helpless. The depth-thinking religious publication can help us see connections to events, not be secular cause and effect, but by the transcendent moral activity of God working through them. Instead

of focusing on the isolated event, seek the transcendent pattern.

Example. In Christian Century, after Pearl Harbor, the editorial "An Unnecessary Necessity" began a profound series in which the magazine explained its switch from a pacifist position to one of supporting the war effort. In the articles that followed Editor Morrison traced God's participation in the events that brought about the catastrophe and demonstrated that the war was an aspect of God's wrath and judgment upon all people, and that no person or country could claim righteousness.

c. Instead of sentimentalizing injustice in events, appealing to an insincere love, let articles and series lift us to the level of God's majestic activity. There are plenty of models. The Yahwist tied together isolated traditions and forged them into a coherent pattern, and it was the entire complex that shouted to the rooftops of God's unmistakable activity in history. In the *primaeval* history the Yahwist says, "Look, this is sin! This hubris! This is what destroys the world." Thucydides did it with the Peloponnesian War. He didn't say, "God hates war and loves peace", lift up a few children and make it into a little moral homily. No, there was terrible reality, etched in epic outlines that said, "It is greed, and lust for power that did this." Too many articles today read like sentimentalized wire service reports. They are often cold, objective, legalistic, with a dash of teardrops added.

d. The religious publication can help us recover the depth and power of the sacred texts. To use a text as a morality lesson devalues the texts and obscures the reality of God walking up and down in history. In particular, the religious publication is in the best position to

attack all of the old canards, including the suppositions of the history of religions school that holds the Old Testament is the work of primitives. The upshot of these anti-Semitic suppositions is that no one witnesses to God in history but the gospels. All other texts, including secular classics, may be sniffed at as either heretical or insignificant. The witness of Mark--and Mark's dependence on the suffering witness of all those in his past--demonstrates otherwise.

2. Religious Creative Writers, Dramatists, and Poets.

The creative arts--of which Mark 10 is a profound example--also suffers from blindness. Having lost sight of the LORD of history, contemporary religious and secular literature have both largely fallen into sentimentality or superficiality. Yet it is within the prose and poetic narrative where guides to God's reality can best be recovered in history.

Religious drama and literature is not telling bible stories--as if the Bible itself were no use at all--but deep probings of the human blindness that carries the weak and strong alike, innocent and guilty, to historical catastrophe. We have exchanged epics that turn around sin, punishment and forgiveness⁷ for bathrobe drama. Secular artists can reach the heights with Chicken George and we can only give them Charlton Heston.

⁷ Gilbert Murray describes Aeschylus' great trilogy The Oresteia as revolving around these three deep unsolved mysteries of life. It is tragic that the sacred would abandon that which it once held dear and the genius of the secular arts also recognized. Aeschylus, The Orestia (London: Allen & Unwin, 1928), p. 5ff.

The characters described in great classical literature often are foils for the witness of the pain and price of the mortal who oversteps his creaturely bounds and invades the sphere of the divine. In Mark 10 the struggle is with hardhearted callousness, an insolence that refuses to see even when it is at the very brink of total historical disaster. Tragic awe and pity intermingle.

But today's popular religious reader, or audience, or congregation, are often blissfully unaware of tragic human struggles and the sin we are all caught up in. Instead they get weak morality plays or their eyes are misdirected to the objective sight of the characters, dazzled like Peter is of Jesus. Indeed, even the secular dramatist has become captive of the objective and has lost audiences to the detail of over-characterizations.

Let our gifted writers, dramatists and poets confess and repent, and arise straightaway with books, plays, dramatizations and films that reach deep into the realities of human life. Let us restore an art and a drama to literature that focuses once again on deeper realities: on the historical destiny of greed, power, misused authority, overweening pride, hardheartedness, rebellion, avoidance of reality, sentimentality, superficiality, and blindness to God.

"Art," says the Roman critic, "lies in concealing art." The Greek, European and Russian classics all cloaked their deepest insights into historical narrative. We have forgotten. Let us be done with moralistic secular and religious literature and the sort of impoverished drama that escapes reality like shoot 'em ups in living color. Where there is no vision, says our scripture, the people perish.

3. Denominational Mission

The keys to the kingdom in Mark go to those who uphold, give of their plenty and protect the rights of the weak to justice and mercy. The LORD of history reserves the right to grant the blessing, and the servant of the LORD, adopted and loved as a son, mediates that blessing to the far coastlines. The denominational organizations, to greater and lesser extents, determine the focus of the mission of the church. Denominational leaders may consider:

- a. Stimulating the secular-dialogue.
- b. Encouraging and creating literature and curriculums that recover the depth of biblical conceptions, including blindness, upholding, rewards and punishments, sin, Torah and law, confession and repentance, power and powerlessness, commissioning and authority.
- c. Creating task forces on worship for theological re-examination of the sacraments to recover adoration and responsibility to the LORD of History. If it is true that certain practices, liturgies, sacraments have dissolved reality into symbol, such task forces or commissions may make recommendations.
- d. Re-examining the denominational position on human relationships in the light of Mark 10, including divorce.
- e. Finding ways to adequately critique the legalism of contemporary secular law, rule and regulation, lifting to public consciousness the failure of foundational justice and mercy. In particular, institute a secular-sacred dialogue with members of the legal community, including law schools, bar associations, judges associations, and correctional and administration of justice associations.

f. Re-opening the theological debate on the mission of the church and consider an evangelism that focuses on the actual extension of justice and mercy to the far coastlines as an authentic report (proclamation) of God's activity, instead of winning mere verbal assents to the truth of the gospel.

g. Re-examining stewardship as one of the means by which God's justice and mercy is mediated and to deepen the theological understanding of tithes and offerings as the true source of human responsibility.

h. Re-evaluating the mission of denominational publishing houses and finding ways to encourage and train creative artists to grapple with the classic struggles of humanity striving against the transcendent.

i. Re-evaluating the educational mission of the church and consider focusing learning on discovering the reality of God in the history of our time, rather than the learning of objective moralisms, or ethical codes for the presumed betterment of citizens, or receiving free tickets to an objective world without responsibility to history.

j. Joining the son of Timaeus and other sufferers throughout history, confessing failure to secure justice and mercy in our world and crying out "Mercy! Me!"

4. Church-Related Liberal Arts Colleges.

Mark 10 begins with a setting that emphasizes a teaching about God, the LORD of History. The church-related liberal arts college can join:

a. The secular-dialogue, providing and creating forums.

b. In identifying and encouraging creative writers within the faculty and student body to contribute to the renewal of the sight of God in history in our religious publications.

c. In creating courses in which creative and gifted students may study how classical and biblical authors threaded narrative events together to undergird their visioning of an order and a justice that is higher than mortals. This might include secular works as those of Greek tragedians and studies of philosophies of history, such as those in Greek literature, St. Augustine and others.

d. In creating foundational political science courses where law, power, and authority are examined in depth with critiques from a Judeo-Christian perspective.

e. In identifying ways in which higher education can become more confessional, instilling in students the Socratic-search for truth, always elusive, always explicated and re-explicated in every moment of history. The righteous religious or secular students are equally menacing to the poor, the forgotten the defenseless.

f. In creating a "Problem of History" course, examining classical, biblical, and Greco-Oriental religious texts. Herberg's Judaism and Modern Man is one excellent resource.

5. The Seminary.

Mark 10 says it was the religious professors, who held the authoritative seat of Moses, who first turned from the way and deceived their students. The seminary can consider being more intentional in the focus of certain aspects of its mission:

a. It can raise consciousness to the problem of history throughout its curriculum. Theologians can sharpen the problem with specific background courses. Historians can outline the moral vision seen connecting events in classical and post-classical periods and the chaos when none was seen.⁸ Old Testament professors can raise consciousness on how the great narrative complexes gave meaning to history, how priestly writers, prophets and redactor historians turned from the God of objective abstraction and saw a LORD of History working actively, concretely within human political and social events. New Testament professors can sketch the collision between the dominant Greek secular society that have escaped reality through the abstraction of its own ideals, and those followers of Jesus who were impelled by a transcendent moral visioning which could not be escaped.⁹ World religions professors

⁸The history of the human condition as seen in art and literature is another way to break through student detachment and see that at their profoundest moments, creative artists have always dealt with the same agonizing realities of life as have the biblical texts. Rude minds can be sensitized to Dante's struggle with sin, Bach's Mass in B-Minor, Rembrandt's diminutive etchings of the tramp and vagabond, the Gothic escape from a world too brutal to contemplate, the pietist humns in passionate revolt against mechanized Reason and the lifeless chant, the impressionists who rediscovered empirical joy and humanity, Halley's Roots, etc. Even in the darkest days when organized religion blinded itself by fanatical devotion to its own authoritarian ideals, there have always been artists with sensitized souls who saw suffering and witnessed to it. Cf. Hendrik Willem Van Loon, The Arts (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937), which is the most profoundly human of the art histories.

⁹Classical Greek philosophical texts could be compared with biblical narrative. More significant, perhaps, the great narrative works of Greek dramatists could be the foil. For instance, compare the power of teaching sin in Agamemnon with Paul's more objective transcendent conception set in Romans' letter form. How Homer and Hesiod began detachment as a way to avoid demon-fear and yet find order in the

can be intentionally synoptic, comparing the non-attachment escape from injustice by other-worldly Greco-Oriental religions, with the personal, unmistakable this-worldliness of Hebraic religion. Ethicists can seek transcendent connections to events of this century and lead students to hunger for sight of transcendent moral visioning in the events of today. Religious educators can struggle with the pedagogy of opening the eye of the soul to living transcendent activity and how to pass insight onwards to the wondering eye in the pew.¹⁰ Homeletics professors can help

cosmos could be studied. Thucydides and Herodotus can be studied as examples of theological historical narrative. Classical thinkers probed deeply. We can use them to help us see what some of our preconceptions blind us to in biblical narrative. Synoptic exegesis can be encouraged in Mark and elsewhere, emphasizing structural outlines based on seeing pairs, contrasts, antitheses.

¹⁰ Much penetrating thought is needed to recover the profundity and application of classical and biblical educational theory of moral visioning. For instance, Socrates abandons the cosmological search for truth that seeks beginnings or ends in nature and explores the moral universe, seeking knowledge by opening the eye of the soul. Cf. F. M. Cornford, Before and After Socrates (London: Cambridge University Press, 1932), pp. 44-47.

Hebraic theory emphasizes blindness and the calloused heart that falsifies or is even impervious to sense impressions. Cf. Paul's Romans which rebutes Stoic theory that sense impressions can be received in reliable condition from which Reason may then make fair judgments. Cf. Marvin L. Kennon, "Epictetus' Theory of Freedom Critiqued by Paul's Romans", unpublished MS., 1980.

Religious educators would again force students to struggle with what hardens the human heart and how the callousness may be broken through. Sooner or later the authentic powerlessness and weakness of the human condition is faced and studied as to how that reality might be raised to consciousness of others. Note: this is fundamentally different from some contemporary approaches to moral visioning that ignore sight of God in history and instead lift up rule-breaking, violations of tradition, or the pettifoggery of non-approved personal habits of eating, drinking, and loving--all of which devaluates the tragic classical-Hebraic understanding of sin.

events of our time. Challenge the secular technocracies for their lack of moral visioning. Denounce the brutality of the devaluation of art, drama, literature, philosophy, ethics, religion, and liberal arts in secular society. Describe how it impoverishes the soul of humanity. Challenge the legalism and irresponsibility of any educational system that will hinder students from seeing the reality of history and maintain the delusion that no one need be the keeper of his brother and his sister. The seminary public relations office is an ideal coordinator, arranger, prodder, and stimulator.

c. The seminary faculty is a gold mine resource for religious books and publications. Denominational puff, where it exists, can best be challenged by the production of articles and books that grapple with the epic struggles of the human soul. I would urge books that teach by witnessing to God's activity within events. Theologies of history are needed. The ethicist or historian can string together world events of this century and again demonstrate the delusion of human power and the soul-destroying force of human greed. The biblical expert can take narrative complexes and demonstrate historical connections with God's activity, sin, judgment, grace, power, authority, upholding. Let's stop trading footnotes and get to the theological guts that plague human existence. New Testament experts need to write articles and books recovering justice in New Testament thought and attacking the new Marcion heresy that would deprive followers of Christ of the foundational understandings of Old Testament witnesses. Some writers are needed to engage in the secular dialogue, and revive the challenge of religious apologetics as did Paul himself, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and

students distinguish between objective ideas that detach from history (the classic three-point Greek oration-sermon, for instance!) and the entwining of visions of reality into concrete narrative historical contexts.¹¹ Pastoral counselors can lead students to see how disorder and disjunction in human society has moral connections with the flow of reunion and return in human events.¹² Church management professors can zero in on the mission identification process that sees human hurting in history and marshals together group focus and activity to heal it. There is no aspect of seminary life that cannot intentionally raise consciousness if it becomes a seminary priority.

b. The seminary theologians can invade the college and university campus, engage in forthright debate, identify and defrock the secular idols. They can demonstrate to those who would see that it is not cause and effect that imperils humanity, but an insolent human pride that deifies the creation of human hands. The secular campus is convinced of its own righteousness. Teach blindness. Speak their *koinē*, take all of their beloved ideals, and cast them into the context of the historical

¹¹I can envision some emphasis on distinguishing between the detached general abstraction in speaking which implicitly teaches separation from reality, and the more personal concrete in which pictures of reality are vividly lifted to sight. In a similar way, consciousness may be raised to the value of speaking by pictorial analogy in which sight is emphasized (Hebraic insight), compared to classical cause and effect (Greek materialist) in which mechanized reason is emphasized.

¹²CPE's and overseas parish internships can be lifted to greater consciousness as an effective means of breaking through narrow visioning with the jarring reality of profoundest human joy and suffering. For example, a few weeks of living with a Jamaican family awoke me to the poetry and anguish of human suffering, and a summer CPE in a women's prison convinced me of my self-preoccupation and judgmental detachment.

Origen. Others need to fill the void now filled by comic book theologians and end-of-the worlders, and write true apocalyptic, so that we will again understand, with Mark, that when the widows and orphans are the only ones giving of their whole selves in defense of others in the society, then the death of nations is about to begin. Tell them when that happens there is no limit to the suffering; the innocent and guilty alike participate in the sin of the whole society that does not hear any voice beyond than their own. Reality! Not illusion, not superstition. Ask human hearts to do as Mark and the prophets do: "Look to yourselves! Wake up! Rouse from the dreams of your own invention and see the reality of history."

Many theological books that are written today are cast in the objective mode, divorced from history. Such detachment checks spiritual force, guarding it for itself. When thinking is separated from the narrative of events, past or present, it implicitly reinforces the dulling of the empirical senses and the sight of transcendent activity in history is thereby obscured. God becomes a "god idea" and not a living LORD. Such books promote continuation of blindness, not confession and repentance.

d. If the seminary does nothing else it would convince students of their blindness, their utter poverty, and of the ideals that tragically blind us to the reality of God working good out of evil in the events of our time. Over and over again in the biblical texts (including Mark 10), the human thinks he "knows". But images are prohibited! The mortal is commanded to "see" within the events of history. "Objective thought, philosophical or scientific knows nothing of the

absolutely concrete, absolutely unique; all thinking is necessarily in terms of abstractions, universals."¹³ Ideals--Platonic "ideas" or any other ideals--are lifeless cosmic patterns detached from history, that have no independent existence beyond human inventiveness. When my ideal is my political system, I am liable to blindness to its sins. When my ideal is Whiteheadian philosophy, I am liable to blindness to any other sight. When my idea of "good" is a personal code, I am liable to blindness to any other "good" beyond the one I created or accepted with my own mind. The idealist is caught up and entangled with tragic sin. So are we all. Religious idealists are often the greatest murders. Whole populations in history have been blotted out as first one conquerer after another sought to establish the genius of his own ideals, ignoring the LORD of history. The student who leaves seminary righteously is armed with seeds of destruction. He will look and look but not see. Listen and listen, but not hear.

Can we not teach blindness to the individual event or pericope? In biblical studies can we not take students down the blind pathway of their own making and convince them experientially that they do not understand the text and may perhaps never understand it? I wonder how many ever despair of discovering truth when so many different textual interpretations have been legitimized and become authoritative in Christian history? Cannot students be taught that our hope is to look for an overall pattern and structuring? We may, perhaps still not be able to see rightly, because some texts are so difficult, but at least

¹³Herberg, p. 11.

we have trained ourselves better to see events in life as connected, as whole. We might see, for instance, that death is not the other side of life, nor isolated from it, but part of a continuous chain of happenings for which a merciful God has worked paradise out of chaos. We may not be able to see and understand life either--we are so tragically blind--but at least we have become sensitized. We are no longer automatons. We know at last of our utter helplessness. There! There is the glimmer of confession and hope of repentance the seminary can teach. There! In moments when all hope of knowledge is absolutely lost, the scales may fall away from the eye of the soul, and a more gracious vision of justice and mercy in history may emerge on the wings of mystery.

6. The Local Church.

Oh, that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire upon my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.

Malachi 1:10

In Mark 10 the purifying messenger is recognized only by the blind beggars, so deep is the tragic resistance to sight. But the narrow gate is finally closed in chapter 11 and all evidence of God is finally expunged from the robbers' den. Who can say whether the Church of Jesus Christ is yet at such a crossroads? But in every moment there is a certain choice for the local church. It can choose to follow the dominant secular spirit in which reality is objectified and detached, where history is devaluated, where life is lost in symbol. Or, it can become convinced of its blindness to the empirical reality of God, and the desperate need to see.

a. The pastor can witness to his own blindness--as did Socrates, as did Job, as did the son of Timaeus. If the pastor's confession and repentance is not authentic, then the meaning of loss and "turning around" can be obscured and the people misled. (Those who want authoritarian answers may follow Peter, James and John.)

b. We can teach blindness, proclaiming it from the pulpit, in our classrooms, in our mission statements, and as an undercurrent in everything the church does. Our overarching mission can be to recover the sight of the reality of God in history.

c. If we are to recover sight of transcendent activity then our congregations have to have their consciousness raised on what masters they are following. Before we can see God we have to see idols and be able to recognize them. The popular understanding of idols is perhaps of a primitive statute or carving of a fake God in antiquity or in some extremely primitive contemporary society. Through proclamation, or whatever other means of religious education is at hand, we must clarify that idols are substitutionary faiths of loyalty and fidelity. To the degree we give full or partial loyalties to these substitutional faiths, we rob the transcendent God of the faith that belongs to the One Lord.

d. Contemporary idols can be identified and unmasked not by objective reasoning, but by superimposing them onto historical events so that learners may see the beginning and the end, the nature and destiny of all idols. The biblical literature is replete with examples that can be used synoptically. In the cosmogony of Mark 10 some of the more insidious ones include final faith in one's own judgment, the

certainty of knowledge, the righteousness of historical rewards, the belief in the effectiveness and redemptiveness of human power and authority, the reliance on self for all sustenance and protection. These are profoundly and deeply held faiths, then and now. Since the Enlightenment society has harbored Reason close to its breast, as if all war and ignorance will go away if we but build enough schools and universities. Science, a useful gift for humanity, became deified, as well as evolutionary Progress, and the notion of the progressive growth of ever-superior civilizations. Those who continue to hold on to these idols, of course, have to ignore the twentieth century in which war, horror and capacity for evil has spread to an alarming planetary scale. Richard Niebuhr and Will Herberg clearly define and clarify major contemporary idols and many have been already mentioned earlier.¹⁴ But there are others. Wherever one discovers an objectified ideal there is at least a partial diety lurking to mislead. The female model of the television ad, robs men and women of their knowledge of female loveliness and humanness. The image of the slick Playboy who lives splendidly with the proper stereo equipment and detachable female admirers, robs young men of any historical insight into the fulfillment and blessing of giving one's life away. Perhaps television and radio commercials of "happy retirement years" with nest eggs profitably saved at X-Y-Z's bank or savings and loan association, has done more to devalue aging in the sight of the young and convince the maturing that the goal of life is to detach one's self from all responsibilities and play

¹⁴See n. 6 above.

shuffleboard or sip lemonade in a mobile home at Sun City. Again and again objectified ideals organize understanding of human existence and deceive and enslave us, blinding us to the realities of historical existence. Again and again, they are "possessions" that we can guard or "keep for ourselves". We are all entangled in this.

e. Blindness can be recovered as a recurring motif in the bible, though proclamation or classroom theater, or retreat. Mark is a rich resource, and the Old Testament is no less of one. Focus might be cast upon major figures in our biblical literature, so repeated blind, lifted up to teach us that it is a general human condition that none may escape. There is non-judgmental comfort in the tragic blindness of those we believe are more worthy than us.

f. Retreats, classroom, or proclamation can also lift Torah as a guide for blind ones who are struggling to sensitize themselves to distinguish between good and evil, justice and mercy, in history. Law can be equated with Torah, as founded on mercy, and meant to be given by a person, rather than kept by a legalistic avoidance.

g. Once the dominance of the secular spirit is broken down, perhaps we'll have a better chance at penetrating the depth of our scripture as witness guides to the reality of God's activity in the history of past and present events. We have been blind to its richness. The secular spirit that rejects scripture as the work of primitives must be exposed as fraudulent. We can attack the history of religions heresy and the notions of progressive superiority of civilizations (our own, naturally, being the most superior). Bring the Old Testament, so demonstrably important to Mark, back into worship, back into preaching,

back into classroom. But don't bring back the fables we have read into the text in order to reject them again. Let us restore the full power of the biblical witness to the reality of the LORD of history.

h. Proclamation can include apologetic sermons to recover the significance of historical religion, and series can be preached teaching once again the theological basis for power, authority and political thought.

i. In preaching every idol of society stands under criticism. But there is no justification for theocracy as James and John would have it. All is secular. Every crowned head, mitered or no, is a human one. Theocracies are for those who would rebel against God and make themselves the authority. God alone leads and our proclamations themselves stand under the judgment and criticism of the Sovereign Lord.

j. Worship, where motives are purified as right offerings are brought to the LORD, can be recovered where now it is partially or totally lost in objective symbol. Worship is for the confessing, repentant soul, that seeks a true LORD and adores the Master that is found. I suspect that worship can be recovered only to the degree the pastor, leaders and congregation are convinced of their blindness and the reality of the human condition. A pastor who objectifies and finds no God in history beyond his own desires or sentimentalities, will doubtless reinforce the detachment of the congregation and worship becomes lost in abstraction. Those sacraments and rituals incorporated into worship that have slipped into symbol can be re-examined from the pulpit and in the classroom. In Mark 10 baptism, the cup, confession, blessing, distribution of gifts, tithes and offerings, the invocation

(address) are not symbolic actions, but realities that go to the heart of the struggles of suffering humanity.¹⁵ It is unfortunate that secular society views many of the sacraments as superstitious magic tricks. More unfortunate because that is how often we have used them. The secular sees us for what we are!

k. There can be little recovery of interest in justice and mercy without recovery of scripture. It is up to the pastor-leader to elevate interest, but the degree that it is lifted will likely be linked to the intensity of the pastor's own study.

l. The servant-leader can join the secular-dialogue but initiating them, perhaps, in cooperation with local ministerial associations. Caution: those who dialogue for the deceiving purpose of increasing membership of their own church--or even for the church as a whole--have impure motive. Our commission is to go! follow! Evangelism is glad tidings that the old slave tyrant is dead and heralds the joyous arrival of a new Master full of hope. But the despot really does have to be dead. Mere Words saying so won't do the job. Only true light extinguishes darkness.

¹⁵For instance, responsibility is taught by the heave offering. The degree of commitment to God is measured by the human price that is paid. God demands first-fruits, but as Franz Rosenzweig notes, there are four degrees of price mortals are willing to pay to uphold truth: unimportant truths (i.e. the truth of a proposition like 2+2=4) which take only a trifling mind energy to assent to; 2) on to other truths for which we have to be willing to pay something; 3) truth that cannot be proved except by sacrifice of life; and 4) truth that cannot be proved except by staking the lives of all the generations. Herberg, p. 36.

D. A CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The end of this work is back at the beginning. It is the old problem of meaning of history. The ultimate problem. We have become blind to the activity of God in history. Our own sin, our own separation, our own ideals and idols have divided us from all reality. We have tried to divorce God from history without a certificate. God is still living in our houses of worship. But will the Sovereign Lord remain forsaken forever? The pages of history are crammed with pictures of the LORD's answer to that one. In one war, one famine, one human disaster after another we see the foaming cup being drained by those who would love only themselves, and ignore his gracious wish that justice and mercy be extended to the far coastlines.

We are terribly, terribly blind in this century. We must confess, repent, cover our heads with ashes and shame and dare to sing and follow our transcendent LORD even if it be too late and the next holocaust overtake us.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Achtemeier, Paul J. Mark. Ed. Gerhard Krodel (Proclamation Commentaries. New Testament Witnesses for Preaching) Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.
- Aeschylus. The Oresteia. Trans into English rhyming verse by Gilbert Murray. London: Allen and Unwin, 1928.
- Aristotle. The Rhetoric & The Poetics of Aristotle. Trans. W. R. Roberts and Ingram Bywater (Modern Library) New York: Random House, 1954.
- Auerbach, Erich. Mimesis. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946.
- Augustine. The City of God Against the Pagans. Trans. William M. Green, ed., T. E. Page. 2 vols. (Loeb Classical Library) Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963.
- Bauer, Walter. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature Trans. and ed. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.
- Bratcher, Robert G., and Eugene A. Nida. A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark. Leiden: Brill, 1961.
- Butcher, S. H. Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art: With a Critical Text and Translation of THE POETICS. 4th ed. New York: Dover, 1894, 1907.
- Calvin, John. "Commentaries on Malachi", in his Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets. Trans. John Owen. 6 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950. Vol. V.
- _____. A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke. Trans. T. H. L. Parker, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance. 2 vols, (Calvin's Commentaries) Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972.
- Cornford, F. M. Before and After Socrates. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1932.
- _____. Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato translated with a Running Commentary. New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957.
- Cranfield, C. E. B. The Gospel According to St. Mark. 2nd ed. with supp. notes. (Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary) London: Cambridge University Press, 1959, 1963.
- Eichrodt, Walther. Theology of the Old Testament. Trans. J. A. Baker. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1933, 1961.
- Gasque, W. W. "Courage", in Interpreter's Bible Dictionary. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976. Supp. Vol.

- Gould, Ezra P. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark (International Critical Commentary) Edinburgh: Clark, 1896.
- Greek New Testament. Ed. Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger and Allen Wikgren. 3rd ed. New York: American Bible Society, 1966.
- Guthrie, W. K. C. The Greek Philosophers from Thales to Aristotle. New York: Harper & Row, 1960.
- Hamilton, Edith. The Echo of Greece. New York: Norton, 1957.
- _____. The Greek Way. Rev. ed. New York: Norton, 1930, 1943.
- Herberg, Will. Judaism and Modern Man: An Interpretation of Jewish Religion (Temple Book) New York: Atheneum, 1951.
- Herodotus. History. Trans. A. D. Godley, ed. T. E. Page. 2 vols. (Loeb Classical Library) Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920, 1926.
- Heschel, Abraham J. Man's Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954.
- Josephus. Jewish Antiquities.
- Kaiser, Otto. Isaiah 1-12: a Commentary. Trans. R. A. Wilson (Old Testament Library) Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963.
- Kelber, Werner H. Mark's Story of Jesus. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979.
- Kennon, Marvin L. "Epictetus' Theory of Freedom Critiqued by Paul's Romans", unpublished MS., 1980.
- _____. "See-Together Composition in Mark 14:53-72", unpublished MS., 1977.
- _____. "What is the Literary Form of Mark 1:1-13?", unpublished MS., 1980.
- Metzger, Bruce M. A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament. 3rd ed. London: United Bible Societies, 1971.
- Moulton, W. F., A. S. Geden and H. K. Moulton. A Concordance to the Greek New Testament. 5th ed. Edinburgh: Clark, 1897, 1978.

- Muilenburg, James. The Way of Israel: Biblical Faith and Ethics. New York: Harper & Row, 1961.
- Murray, Gilbert. Five Stages of Greek Religion. 2nd ed. New York: AMS Press, 1925.
- New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha. Ed. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Niebuhr, R. Richard. Radical Monotheism and Western Culture: with Supplementary Essays. New York: Harper & Row, 1943.
- _____. The Responsible Self: an Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1963.
- Niebuhr, Reinhold. Faith and History. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949.
- Nineham, D. E. Saint Mark (Pelican New Testament Commentaries) Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963.
- Oepke, Albrecht. "βάπτω, βαπτίζω" in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Ed. Gerhard Kittel. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964. I, 529-546.
- Pedersen, Johannes. Israel: Its Life and Culture, 2 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1926.
- Plato. Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus. Trans. Harold N. Fowler, ed. T. E. Page (Loeb Classical Library) Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914.
- _____. The Republic. Trans. Paul Shoreley, ed. T. E. Page. (Loeb Classical Library) Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930.
- _____. Timaeus. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. Indianapolis: Liberal Arts Press, 1949.
- Septuagint Version of the Old Testament and Apocrypha with an English Translation. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977.
- Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr I. A World Split Apart: Commencement Address Delivered at Harvard University, June 8, 1978. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.
- Taber, C. R. "Divorce", in Interpreter's Bible Dictionary. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976. Supp. vol., p. 244.
- Taylor, Vincent. The Gospel According to St. Mark. London: Macmillan, 1955.

Thornton, Harry and Agathe. Time and Style: A Psycho-Linguistic Essay in Classical Literature. London: Methuen, 1962.

Thucydides. History of the Peloponnesian War. Trans. Charles Forester Smith, ed. T. E. Page. 2 vols. (Loeb Classical Library) Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920.

Van Loon, Hendrik Willem. The Arts. New York. Simon and Schuster, 1937.

Whitman, Cedric H. Homer and the Heroic Tradition. New York: Norton, 1958.